

Laguna Woods History Center
Community Oral History Project
Transcript

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ABSTRACT: James Thorpe was the mayor of San Juan Capistrano. He later became the mayor of Laguna Woods after it was incorporated in the 1990s. This interview covers his political career and votes to being in local politics. He shared about his contributions to the development of southern Orange County as he served on the OC Planning Commission. He shared about developing South county infrastructures such as water management. James was instrumental to the formation of Saddleback College in 1968. He taught at the college and served as the Dean of Science, Math, Engineering and Technology. Thorpe shared about his time as a city planner, his time as mayor, and the creation of Leisure World [Laguna Woods] and not Saddleback City.

JK: We are here at the Laguna Woods History Center on February 24th, 2023 to conduct this oral history with Mr. Thorpe regarding his regional impact to Orange County history. My first question for you is, would you share about your arrival to California? A bit about your upbringing and arrival story for our listeners?

JT: So I'm an immigrant from Ohio and came out here to California, after doing my undergraduate work at Miami University in Ohio, the original Miami University and TA teaching assistant at the University of California at Berkeley, and got introduced to the Bay Area that way. And since that time I've been in California most of time with a detour. My wife and I spent our honeymoon while I went to Graduate School at Harvard to get my second master's degree. Since that time we've lived in places like Walnut Creek and Gilroy, CA out of Gavilan Community College there. And then came down here to Southern California and moved into San Juan Capistrano — And I was the original Dean of Science, Math, Engineering and Technology at Saddleback College and helped start the college in 1968.

JK: Would you share about the topography and cultural observations in 1968 of Southern California for you?

JT: Most of the Saddleback district was in the south county, actually it covers all of what's now Irvine and Tustin and to the South and most of that was rolling green hills or brown hills depending upon the time of the year. The San Juan Capistrano and old, established community was about three thousand and then San Clemente was a little bit bigger and Laguna Beach. And then most of the developed area was further to the north. Areas like Tustin at all and they just beginning the big developments in Irvine and Mission Viejo at that time, we had offices across from the high school in some model homes where we started planning for the college and the sign on the, what was not much of a freeway at that time — said that, probably that Mission Viejo had a population of four thousand four. So it was the big unrolling new developments was there, but many of the other developments that we know now, especially in Irvine, hadn't begun at that time. So it was — in a way, a kind of a pioneering area. It was one of the few places in Southern California that didn't have a community college district previously. So a lot of what we did was to — introduce the Community College concept and convince people from the few high schools that existed down here that they wanted to go to school with us.

JK: Do you recall cattle on Moulton Ranch during these years by chance in the 60s?

JT: Oh yeah, there was, there were still a number of functioning branches there and lots of farmers markets and things and see people in the fields and still cattle and horses and sheep in some different places in the south county, so if you wanted — an urban experience, you had to go up to Santa Ana or Newport Beach or someplace like that. But if you wanted a more rural experience, there was usually one within a mile of your home. (laughter)

JK: (laughter)

JK: You mentioned in your early years also the water is managing that resource and knowing the history of this area— ranchers in managing that resource. Had you met with them in the early preliminary planning stages of waste, managing water and land and converting it to development? Would you share about those?

JT: You know most of those things I didn't really learn about, and although it's very interesting that we're paralleling and as we do this interview the year that we moved here in terms of the heavy rains that came early in the fall. We moved in the winter of 68/69

into a new home in a subdivision in San Juan Capistrano, and at that time we had quite a bit of early season rain, got everything wet and then some new and some big rains came later and we're kind of waiting today to see what's going on outside to see if something like that happens. And they had a once every twenty-five year flood that took out a few fairways in San Juan Capistrano. So water is a kind of two-pronged thing we need it, but we would rather not have it in large quantities and there we got to experience a flood and then later on when I was serving on the San Juan Capistrano City Council, I also served on the water district and later on the sewer district. So with water — you will worry about where to get it, And having enough for your uses, but then you have to also get rid of it. So with every water source and you've got to worry about how to treat it. And in those days, that pretty much went into the ocean, but it was treated beforehand, so that that's always been a part of my experience in Southern California and of course, we had to plan for the buildings at Saddleback College — the actual beginning campus was where the Mission Viejo Hospital is now and that was in model homes, apartments, and — temporary buildings and we've been moved it over the hill to the campus where it is now.

JK: Excellent — would you also share about the formation of Saddleback College in terms of other leadership, that and other persons that you worked with the early formation of the college?

JT: Now they started out with a — skeleton crew. I guess you would say they there were about a dozen of us in the model homes and several — division chairs and department chairs at that time, most of us are doing multiple things, mine was science, math, engineering and technology, which within a few years was four different divisions. And then we had — McKinney and Fine Arts and — Howard Marku in business and social science. Changed around a little bit in the first year, but the in all those areas we were inventing — so to speak, a college, we didn't have any real model for the situation that we were starting with so we just put the classes together and spend most of our time trying to put together a faculty which is actually going to be more important to every college, then the building sets, the people who are teaching in the buildings and how they react to the students. So that was our focus during that period of time, but at the same time, that's when I first came to Laguna Woods where — we are now and living because we had to convince everyone in the district to pass a bond issue for us so that we could start building the buildings. And as it turned out that they selected me to come to the new community of Leisure World and convince all these retired people that they should vote for a community college. And as it turned out, it

did them well later on, but at that time there were some reasons they sent me the mathematician over to talk to people about it, because in fact they had been [sic] been taxed for a period of time for building buildings and other community college districts of whenever students graduated from high schools down here and were sent to the other districts, that they would be taxed and charged tuition and it was added to the tax bill. So we actually could show and that was my job to show them that [sic] that in fact their tax rate and their tax bill would go down — by voting for a bond issue and building our own community college, and that was the beginning of a long relationship between the college and Leisure World at the time — and that, I think has been profitable for both.

JK: Would you please share about your relationship with Bob Price as administrator of Saddleback College?

JT: Well, as it turned out, Bob Price, who's picture I'm actually looking at as it turns out, is the first administrator here — became a board member right off the bat, but eventually Saddleback College and — so we worked together in several different capacities and one of them, along with talking about the bond issue which — passed, but also he and I had that team called a leadership class at one time at Saddleback. And he became the board member — who sort of interpreted to the older people here and interpreted to us some of the needs and that led to the formation of something called the Emeritus Institute, which was really — kind of forward-thinking I think at the time — involving older people with classes, continuing education, but then amazing number of people who are here and retired who are actually coming and taking classes. I had a 78-year-old person taking calculus. You really wouldn't think that would be the case, but we were really a resource for everyone because community colleges in California are really — emphasizing the community and offering a broad variety of programs, even though their major function is to do the first two years of college.

JK: Would you share about that monumental 1968 vote that spring?

JT: Well it — really, not too much exciting. Was it actually enhanced my reputation because I came over and with charts and things to show that they actually would have a slight lowering of their tax rate because they wouldn't be able buildings in other places. And the the fact that Leisure World precinct did vote and there was actually one of the higher — and it took a 2/3 vote, so they voted about 68%, just enough to get us through. But it was one of the higher turnouts of vote in the past by a whole lot. But the but it was an advantage for everyone because we could begin to offer programs here, and they wouldn't to have to drive long distances. If they wanted any kind of special programs, they would have to go to Santa Ana or Coast College maybe, but that really, evidently

they thought I did a good job over here. And the people of Leisure World became very aware of us and — interacted not just through Bob Price, but through many of the people who are here and retired people have such a great resource of experience. And here, you know, we've had some of the actors in the 1st plays when they needed a role for somebody was a little bit older. They brought people over from Laguna Woods and those people in many cases were ex Hollywood actors. You know, there was a professional — trove of treasures in the retired community and the community college — was aware of that and began to use it, and there was a lot of it eventually developed at the Emeritus Institute here with a couple of full-time instructors providing recreation. And of course, I have a personal interest in that because my wife was taught synchronized swimming — is featured in the book on the first twenty-five years of history, here as the swimming program for (laughter) Laguna Woods for, excuse me, Leisure World at the time. So we all are — those of us who lived here a long time have to keep reprogramming ourselves because Leisure World after it became a city, became Laguna Woods. And so we had to Laguna Woods Village. And so we still have to try to remember that, but I still go back to Leisure World every once in a while. (laughter)

JK: (Laughter)

JK: Would you share about the formation of the city, your impressions, even prior to your residency here?

JT: The majority of people here didn't really want to have a city. They had already — messed up Laguna Woods had mentioned they'd actually voted pretty much against cityhood when Laguna Hills tried to incorporate, including Leisure World. And — as a result, Laguna Hills ended up going back, redrawing their lines and leaving out Leisure World and incorporating without them and leaving them outside the city. But subsequent to that, they — had a lot of impact from the El Toro military airport. But — Leisure world was certainly a very patriotic area with a lot of veterans and a very supportive of the military. And even when a small plane crashed into a building here, they still supported the military. However, they weren't particularly supportive of the idea of an international airport here and so they had negotiated with the military that they would continue to support them. But the military had said the marines that would be at that time, they would in fact see their air space rights — once they stopped using it as a military airport. There was a great debate going on in the county about whether Orange County Airport would be moved down here and all, and one of the reasons that they considered incorporating was that they were able to spend money to oppose a commercial airport by forming a city and using some of the city revenue for that. So we had a debate and we had a city hood vote. And the city had vote was very, very close it passed by only — an anti-city vote —

I should say passed only by a few hundred votes and it happened to be that I was running at that time and having had some city council experience for city council and Laguna Woods and the — few hundred votes that that I won by were pretty close to the few hundred votes that city had won by. So some people give me some credit for having helped pass that, but as is most things in life, sometimes you make a difference and it may not happen because of you, but maybe it wouldn't have happened without you. So in any case, city hood did come about right about the turn of the century in 1998, spring to 1999 spring our was our campaign and voting and so forth. And we did become a city and — they voted on a name and I became Laguna Woods. And in fact, at the time they said we had about 57,000 trees. So we — are probably what we're what the name implies of Laguna Woods, but not natural trees planted a variety of really interesting different trees here and so Laguna Woods does have woods.

JK: Would you please share about your tenure track at Saddleback College?

JT: Uh, well.

JK: Maybe some of the accomplishments as back core faculty in its early formation.

JT: Well actually, we started Saddleback College, started out at a time when there had been quite a bit of uprise, unrest in colleges and they actually began with a student dress code (laughter) so that some of us got in trouble there a little bit because we were a little concerned about the idea of a dress code. And — And also about and they tried getting the students to cut their hair above the collar and they are all would not let their female faculty members wear pants, slacks, anything like that. So there was quite a bit of debate and uproar there. I'm not sure that I would have actually gotten tenure at Saddleback College if it hadn't been that in 1970 I rode my bike around San Juan Capistrano and got 380 votes in a city hood election, which actually got me elected to the San Juan Capistrano City Council. And so — they didn't bother to try to not give me tenure, and — I'm not sure that they that would have been a big problem anyway because it, as it turned out one of the members of the board of trustees started letting his hair grow, and it started growing over the collar and they were retired or returned Marine who came to Saddleback College, became the student body president and decided he was going to grow his long hair and so it — they finally withdrew it. They didn't withdraw the rule that you had to cut your hair and they just withdrew the enforcement of the rule. (laughter) So Saddleback went back to being having normal college students and who kind of kept up with whatever the mod thing was at that particular time, and after all fashions change very rapidly, especially in Southern California.

JK: What other cultural changes did you witness during this period in the 70s and 80s?
Let's look at those two decades (laughter) for a moment.

JT: Well, I'm not sure that I tapped into every one of the cultural changes. (laughter) What we're looking at is the — following. A lot follows the national picture and all but, most of the time we were so busy trying to build new buildings and all we had started out in model homes — in and patrol offices then we were in some manufactured housing that were just some flats, kind of we even had theaters and those and so we were really busy focusing on trying to — build the plan the new buildings and all, but there were changing political things. We had some members of the board of trustees who were John Birch Society members, so they were very conservative and, they were different points of view but interestingly enough, one of the things that the faculty all loved about the most that they did they wanted faculty to be — the best paid faculty in in California and we became that, although after they opened that door, they (laughter) they, the management, thought a little bit more about it, but I was part of some different negotiations on that, because I was — during some of those years, the President of the California Community College Association and which is a part of the California Teachers Association. So we rustled back and forth quite a bit about some of those things — But the quick movement of housing in Mission Viejo, they were unrolling housing practically over the hills and there always were newly graded areas and Irvine was beginning to grow as well. But especially in the south county of Laguna Niguel, Aliso Viejo area developed and all, and so what we were seeing was new people coming from all over the country and moving into Southern California and that was one of the things that was considerably interesting. At the end of the Vietnam War, because the Vietnamese were — who came out of the country, were processed through Camp Pendleton, many of them ended up living here. And of course, communities like Westminster have a strong ethnic background in from Vietnam. And that was also a challenge for a small college and all dealing with people who had, in many cases, some language barriers and all. And so we were putting in special programs to try to make sure that we were available to and able to communicate with all the students that we had. So a community college quickly has to deal with the changing demographics and all and in our classes, in many cases we were putting people together and had an interdisciplinary studies program in which we've had several different faculty coming from the arts and faculty from the social sciences and faculty from the sciences, trying to get people to understand the nature of the area and understand the cultural differences and I think we, actually probably, because we were growing and new pioneered some programs that might not have been possible, other places that were already established and sort of locked in and so, but we were growing and we could incorporate new people from all over as we grew and I think that's always been a good aspect of the college.

JK: Excellent, In terms of your leadership in San Juan Capistrano, you mentioned some of the environmental challenges with housing and building and developing throughout the area. Would you share a little bit more about floods, seasonal floods and seasonal rains that affect the way in which our county developed from your perspective.

JT: Well, we had that 68/69 flood that — took out two fairways of the golf course that were down by San Juan Creek. And — so people were kind of aware of that. But San Juan also has some of the great history of San Juan — of the Southern California area, and real families lived in the same Adobe since way back. (laughter) And — the probably close to the American Revolution Times — and an element of the community was really concerned that all the houses were going to be turned into subdivisions and so we had during the time I was mayor in 1972, we had a community group that got together sixty to seventy people for about a year. And since the incorporated city was pretty new, we were in a sense, feeling our way and looking at what the important things were to the people in the city and we had — local Indian tribe representatives. We had the land owners who in many cases own larger chunks of agricultural land as well as brand new people who came from somewhere else entirely. Even people from as far away as where I was born in Ashtabula, Ohio and other places as well as people coming in from other countries. And so we needed them to talk to each other about what was important and out of that, we created some things that were more environmentally sensitive, possibly where we're supporters of the early Friends of Mammoth decision and part of a lawsuit against, I think the city of Petaluma that was trying to keep people from using environment as a determining factor in their planning. And so we put together a general plan that provided for historical preservation and also for — building densities that recognized environmental limitations. As it turns out, we have a hillside behind the golf course that has a full size whale embedded in it, down around 40 to 50 feet and is full of soft sand. And We were actually — I got sued along with the other city councilman by one of the banks who owned most of the property there because it turned out that they had bought some land, it was very hard to develop since it was unstable and there's much other unstable land that down in the southern county area since south county is made up of waterways. Mostly canyons, San Juan Creek Canyon being just one of them. And so we had to try to take all of those into consideration and it led actually by the end of the 70s to an election. I served for one term and didn't run again because I was going back to work on my doctorate. But back in 78, we had quite a bit of money being spent by outside entities to try to change the plan that provided for agricultural preservation and for establishing a variety of different levels of housing, Some local housing and some on. We also had decided not to build on top of hills. And so there in San Juan we have a lot of ridge lines that you can still see. And so I came back and ran for city council again, and

we barely beat the developer candidates, but that has kept San Juan sort of unique. All other communities have joined them, but they still have historical preservation. The county, which always inside the north part of the county here in Orange County, where it's all flat, people have a tendency to believe that when they look at a map that the southern county is flat too. So, in 1978 I also started dealing with those at the county planners and all in looking at bigger pictures and all, and eventually I got appointed to the Orange County Planning Commission. Representing this area, which included Laguna Woods and was. As it turned out, almost all the building going down that county was down in my area. So I ended up having the thickest packets of things to look at and all, but we began to look at needs to coordinate — the road systems to look at how all the environmental areas fit together to look at how sewage systems and things were going to be connected and became a lot more environmentally aware. But that's an ongoing discussion and in some cases, battle that continues to today in terms of what is a reasonable amount of population to put in an area and what kinds of road systems are necessary and all. And there are many different choices were made and some I didn't really care for, like the toll roads which — but that the entities of large entities that were building push the toll roads because they helped them build faster and quicker and made the people pay for the roads instead of they're having to build the roads. But that's a you know, one person's point of view, and I'm sure they would tell you that it was a it was a wonderful thing and the only people used the roads had to pay for them, but they were supposed to go away ten years or so ago, and they haven't. So I think we, those of us who said, learned that that was going to happen and been proved to be right that the — we still shouldn't have all those roads should all be free, and I keep telling people that. So if you're still paying for toll road when you when you watch this, you should go and find out from your legislators why that's the case because they're breaking their promise.

JK: Important to note, these historical moments, these decisions. What other critical decisions were made in 1978 during your term serving on that planning commission that would be critical to know, for future researchers.

JT: Well, it mostly had to do with the Irvine Company was moving and the — Michael Stockstill¹ of a fellow I knew about back in those days have written a book about the history of the Irvine Company and his — he can tell you a lot about that from that standpoint.

JK: Yes.

¹ *The Big Plan: Transforming the Irvine Ranch* examines how the Irvine Ranch in Southern California transitioned from an agricultural empire into new town development during the 1960s and 70s. <https://thebigplanbook.com/authors>

JT: But there was a parallel things going on quite related to that in the southern section of the county. And a lot of it was the debate about how things would develop, and those were the things that I remember riding on jeeps around the back of the country and with people from the Irvine Company as they showed me the layout of the land and had a fellow Councilman in San Juan who flew private plane, who took me up in his plane and flew up and down the canyons and I'll tell you, that's the way to see what is really going on and what the development problems are and how connected everyone is so that we each maybe live in our own canyon, Crown Valley or someplace like that, or in our case, Laguna Canyon is an important part to us, but to see how they all tie together and the nature of the and how inner interrelated we are we all depend upon what happens upstream and the people downstream of us have to share whatever we send downstream. And those are the things that everyone needs to learn about when they come into an area like this. And I was able to in the college work in a program called Interdisciplinary Studies in which we had a lot of people who are new to the area, who came just to look at some of our — interdisciplinary studies programs that dealt with environmental interconnections. And how the things that we love, trees, water, various things of that sort are important to us in and not just a physical way, but also in an emotional and mental way. You know, some of us live for our trees. That even though there weren't that many trees in Orange County, and there are people who still hug them. And of course, we will live in Laguna Woods have one that's been around for hundreds and hundreds of years that we go by and take our kids by and our grandkids, and sometimes our great grandkids, (laughter) to see this tree that's been here longer than any of us. Anyway, but you know it, The biggest thing I think I had the privilege of because I was part of the whole area is seeing the interconnectedness of things and — both in teaching and in the political things that I was involved in and a lot of social things I was involved in looking at how the whole area fits together and in the case of Laguna Woods — although it's a wall community, a lot of the people getting out and getting connected. I have a friend named Bill Hoffman who does tours all over and he has been working with the Chicago club here to take everybody out and see all of California. And I think that's really important to — your environment is more than trees and things. Your environment is people and institutions as well, and so turning. I think that's the good part of my life is trying to look at bigger pictures and how we fit sometimes as an important cog and sometimes as observers, but always a part of other people and the environment in which we live, which is not just a physical environment but also a social environment.

JK: Excellent — Would you have any comments about the development of sister cities in your area such as Aliso Viejo, Laguna Niguel, things that would be symbiotic to your

observations here? Would you have any comments to those particular areas that would have been Moulton Ranch land, any observations about — those areas?

JT: Oh yeah. I always think — when I am we've been reconstructing the interstate forever it seems. And so I tend to drive the back roads and I've always been quite happy with the fact that the county put in some nice arterials and — the parkways that run down through Laguna Niguel and all which still seem to move traffic pretty well considering how long ago they were built and all, and so they the communities have done relatively well. And I think that the, the fact that they incorporated of cityhood and began to take over some of their own future. I always was really fascinated by one of the projects that came before the County Planning Commission when I was there called Nellie Gale Ranch, which created and we provided, remember, rolled curbs instead of the usual curbs and gutters and some other things, but it was a very unique and people were questioning, you know, why should you do this? Well, it is interesting to have variety because here's a community which was built to allow people to have horses. If you don't (laughter) don't usually get that and create some trails, but I've been involved — ride bicycle a lot of places all over Orange County and sometimes through Camp Pendleton with a group called the Holy Rollers, which is sort of a Methodist church in San Clemente, but is actually rode all over and included a lot of different people and so I've been big in bicycle trails and I was involved in the approval of bicycle trails down San Juan Creek and when I was on the County Planning Commission that they have the whole county bicycle trail system and I think it's always been neat. We are connected into it here and in Laguna Woods. And we can — I can tap in and ride out, and hang out with the bikers up to the canyon there and have a bar time or we can go all the way up through to or by length if we want to. Unfortunately, I spent a lot of my life fishing in the Lake County Horns and not very good in supporting fishing there, so they don't let float tubes into Irvine Lake and Niguel Lake anymore. And that's it — that that's my biggest disappointment with the county that they — the county of San Diego is very pro fishing. The County of Orange I don't think he even knows what fishing is anymore. (laughter) Too bad.

JK: Would you share about your development as a city council member of Laguna Woods, how that all happened in the 90s? Your return to Southern California, please?

JT: Now I actually had been spending time fishing up at Laguna Wood — in Mammoth Lakes before that happened and — I didn't even know they were going to start even down here until somebody up there said at a political meeting in Mammoth Lakes that, oh, you're going to be trying to incorporate down here so I, we at that time, my wife and I were going back and forth and spending some months up in the place we had opened up in with in Mammoth Lakes and usually the summer time as we skied less and less. And so

I talked to some people about it and I got involved primarily because I felt I could probably help out. And since they had about twenty five candidates running for city council and they — some of them are not really, I think one other person had had some city council experience. Having been on parks and recreation commissions and planning commissions and things, I figured that I could probably help out somewhat, so I — threw my hat in the ring. So to speak. And as it turned out — as I mentioned earlier, we did — did win by a very small amount and then I finished first in the primary. I was helped out by the fact that I was at the top of the ballot. So interestingly enough, the person who was the last of the twenty-five also got elected to the city council. But having a city council in an area where 95% of the people live in a gated community was difficult at the time and has been difficult I think since. So it's turned out to be a little different kind of city and it was — maybe plan to be — everybody knew we'd be sort of feeling our way along and the division of labor as to who does what, how, how you do, what do streets are you're going to have — public streets inside of a gated community we to like. We looked at what was legal and what was not and unfortunately that — various acts that cover homeowners associations are not kind of piece meal package of a whole lot of different things and they've changed a lot. And then of course Laguna Woods has unique situations with its condominiums. But before condominiums, they invented stuff and the —old areas in Laguna Woods are — something that nobody would do anymore. Cooperatives and they — and so they have special structures as well. And the city, the city's decision there essentially was to stay somewhat away from trying to change all that around and either the city trying to take over the community or vice versa. Although effectively almost everybody there probably have only been one or two people on the city council who weren't on some kind of board in Laguna Woods before. So yeah, there's definitely a lot of communication back and forth between the two, and they have to work out a division of labor. We have to decide about things like policing and of course, far too small to have your own police department, and so using the sheriff's services and the county fire services has made it possible to have a smaller city as as we are now. But — towards the end of the term there we came to loggerheads on a major issue, and that was at the end of my city council time because we had —they decided that you could save money by incorporating this general law cities are under a state law and they are, so they have kind of a basic structure and they have spring elections. If you move your election to November, it's cheaper to run the election. Unfortunately, it's also irrelevant as far as I can see. So we had a big debate about that. Our terms were because of the first election where some of us were elected for three years and one month instead of four years because of the odd place of the election. Anyway, we and some people for a year and nine months, so we had terms that ran and would have come up and ended up in the spring with a spring election. But some of the council decided — that they talked to people that would be cheaper running the election in November. We had a big debate

about that and they decided that they wanted to extend their terms from March until November. Well, I had trouble with that because for one thing, I opposed anybody voting to extend their own term without it going to the voters. And so I said, you know, can't do that. I won't. And so that was a four to one vote they decided. And — they set the future of the community of the city by changing the election to November. I served my term that I was elected to and then resigned. What would be about three or four months early just as basically a kind of principal type of thing. I think I've been worn out that the city gets lost in the election. You know, if you have a November election and you have a president and or senators and things of that sort by the time you get to the city like judges, you know, mostly in people don't really know as much about the issues as they probably should. And that was just a point of view, and it didn't seem to be a big deal with most people. So it just happened to be with me. And so that was sort of my end as far as the city was concerned. But you know, I managed to leave my mark on it one day when I was mayor. To start off with, I was walking around the outside of the city. And I walked the whole city, almost 90% of it. I think I've been through on foot because I think you really need to do that. So I happen to be walking down on the edge of the city behind the wall of this mobile home park in Laguna Hills to the north side of the city. And we have this had this messy or dirty looking area outside the walls and so I went back and asked the city manager, "Well, you know, why do we have all this? It's right on the edge of the city. We have the over to the street and we have this area". And she said, well, that's a it's an easement for putting widening that street and putting it in as an overpass, in case they decided to do that". Well, they decided not to when they redid the freeway. So we had this dead area. And so I said, "well, you know, people were saying we needed a dog park, so let's make it into a dog park" It'll be we have to clean it up anyway, so we'll just let people come down here and walk their dog." Well, interestingly enough, that's still a dog park. I never would have believed that they wouldn't have moved and have made other dog parks, but it became a great cause and people kept rebuilding it. And in one year they put in Astroturf. Big mistake. (laughter) It burned the paws of the of the dogs, so they had to take it back out again. And — but it's interesting because of it's going on and on and on, but it's coming out on the edge of the city and I thought we would have some other dog parks by now. But that was kind of the seat of the pants thing when we started out and then we had to, we had streets that the county had not put through. And so we needed to decide what to do with them. And it was street that dead ends and goes nowhere right outside of the one of the gates of the cabinet community. And it just got fenced off and it was for storage area and that was sort of we sort of jammed ourselves in with after all the other cities had incorporated it all and had to decide how we fit what things to do. And we've had a lot of dedicated people who worked on the city. Thing is, doing things from that period of time and — some people said we were too old to manage our affairs and everything, but now that the President is just barely above our minimum age (laughter) or

excuse me of just above our, our average age doesn't look like running things such a bad thing for senior citizens.

JK: Would you please share about your relationship with Bob Ring?

JT: Yea, Bob actually — it depends on how you look at it either I picked him to take my place (laughter) or he just took it anyway. Actually, we had always worked with Bob because he was most of the time the spokesperson to the city. For GRF and the different agencies depending on what position he happened to be in, whether he's president or some other position. He was knowledgeable and had several of the people who had been in the different levels of governance within the community. So we talked about it for a long time, but as soon as I decided that I was going to cut it off when my term I was elected to was over, not the one that, they were going to reestablish, it was pretty obvious as to who was going to get appointed to take my place. I was a big supporter of that and from time to time. We've — since that time we had discussions and things and I worked with it in various ways and certainly he and his group that pushed city hood were also the ones that were fighting for the not having a commercial airport down here and had — gotten involved with a lot of different things, and as it turns out, since my wife was in the Aquadettes² shows. And all and he and Bert Hack and other members of the city council used to do be the announcers, and to tell the lame jokes and things like that. But you know, we and my wife and I have been socially involved with the rings and the hacks for a long period of time. And that's kind of the way things were back in the in the day. Everybody pretty much knew everybody else. The world has gotten bigger — And although the population of the community hasn't gone up that much, but of course there's a lot of turnover here. And — most people have moved on to other retirement areas now.

JK: Would you please comment on your wife service as well and in her role with historical commissioner. In committees and her role in the community at large as well, please.

JT: You know, she as I said, she is a synchronized swimmer and actually demonstrated it — Rome Olympics for synchronized swimming after going around the Europe trying to develop synchronized swimming club so they could get it in the Olympics and she was able to go with the — some of her students synchronized swimming students from Laguna Woods. On a bus tour to the 1984 Olympics, where synchronized swimming began and they all got to see things going on there. And since that time she has been.

² In 1965, the Aquadettes began as a group of all-female lifeguards who collaborated to host a synchronized swimming show and formally became a club one or two years later.

<https://www.aquadettes.org/>

They're taught synchronized swimming, including people who are on the Aquadettes have been a guest Aquadettes performer or in the Aquadettes actually, and she's been so in the book about the first twenty-five years. It does point out that she was the swimming program here she taught — regular swimming as well as synchronized swimming. Aquadettes have more recently become famous because they've been on TV. They're on demand —so you can see them in the — curious world of Jeff Goldblum. I guess it is in one of the early episodes where he came. Down and got in the pool. With them and did synchronized swimming and so that and then she was had an accident a spinal surgery. So she's not swimming with him anymore. But the aqueducts have also were an opening for a TV show that was on for a few times and where about a senior living area and they would just it showed them for about thirty seconds diving around and all. But anyway they've been a relatively famous group by she was teaching synchronized swimming here when my sister called from Ohio and said “I heard Marilyn's voice on *Good Morning America*, but I couldn't see her and it turns out that the accidents have been being covered or the synchronized swimming program here being covered by TV and things for a long time, and it turned out that Good Morning America happened to be covering it and that was many, many years back. But she's still gets recognized and we go to dances and things and somebody will come over and say, oh, I took your swimming class fifteen years ago. So she's been a big part of it and probably more involved in different things in the community than I have been.

JK: In reflecting to you moving into the community, would you share about your perceptions living in Laguna Woods versus your years of service in the city as a resident?

JT: Well, we actually started with the idea that this was going to be the winter backup and it was a way of staying and that we had known people here and regularly Saddleback College had retirees who moved in here and there were still a couple living at the here at the moment. So we've heard a lot about things as well as experienced things more on the political level and then my wife on much more social level because we got invited to parties and things going on here as well and decided that this was a great base of operations and — we travel quite a bit. We do — Or did quite a few cruises with a group called Jazz Dog and Tours, where we would go on a cruise with two or three dixieland jazz bands and some things of that sort and so having a good place to come back to that you don't have to take care of is handy. So we sold off our salmon home to our daughter and son-in-law and moved in here and then spent some time skiing and fishing in Mammoth Lakes and traveling. And it's a great base of operations. Make lots of friends here in Laguna Woods and — they're lifestyle is changes a little bit. The change in management here change this the structure of things a little bit, but. We have, you know, hundreds of friends here because we always go to the key dance every week. TGIF, thank

God it's Friday, and we got at 4:00 there's a live band every Friday here. And the Laguna Woods has become the center of live music. In Southern Orange County, because we now have this explosion of bands that have formed the music, music club and a number of others rock of ages that we go to the rock and rollers group —we're kind of aging up from, but. — And at one time, we actually went to the baby boomers group too, but I don't think we really were in the right age group for that but we like to dance, so it's possible here in Laguna Woods that you can dance every day of the week more than once if you'd like to on this afternoon at TGIF, a woman will show up and dance for two hours, and then she'll go to the ballroom dance club right after that and dance for another two hours. So there are people like that — who and then of course. If you want to hula —different ethnic groups, as they've moved in, have brought some new kinds of dances in, too. So you've got and got people who do country dancing, folk dancing. It's as they say use it or lose it. Well, it's kind of move it or sit still kind of as well. And that's, I think if anything else music and dance is one of the real key things to aging well here and to keeping mind and body both working.

JK: Excellent, Would you share about your perceptions of change over time of Orange Counties' southern development, the southern portion of it?

JT: Well, it's it used to be that Santa Ana was kind of the focus of all of Orange County because all the government was up there and you would have to go there to do things. One of the selling points actually in Laguna Woods as a city was that we would have you would be able to go and get some permits and some things at the city hall. That you you might have — but you had to since we weren't incorporated. You might have to go Santa Ana for if you got called for jury duty. Originally, you always had to go to Santa Ana. Things have changed now so much. Seen it on some online things from the college in general, we probably are more compartmentalized now, and so I don't think people run around at Orange County all over the place doing things, but it was pretty common for us to go to shows and things at UCI when the — See, It was first forming. It was a cultural center. We didn't have a lot of things that went — And if you might have to go a long distance, we had a drive-in theater in San Juan Capistrano. People would go place at all distances for that. Actually, when we first went to San Juan, we used to go to Laguna Niguel to grocery shop or San Clemente because they before they put Vons in San Juan, you didn't have that, but now everything is pretty much close at hand. And I think we have, I don't get out to the eastern part of the county much at all, northeastern. That's the one thing about California it doesn't run straight north-south or east-west. It's everything is at an angle (laughter) I think of — I should say inland or coastal. But so I know a lot of things are out there and when I'm still allow me to paddle my float tube around Irvine Lake, I get to go up that way, regularly. But probably we're a lot more limited in where

we go now. That may be one of the — driving isn't more difficult because the combination of having to pay to get there on toll roads or just kept not being able to get through the construction and the people is of somewhat of a problem, the — If they would just do what they were supposed to and give back the toll road that runs through here, which is underutilized, horribly underutilized, the state should pick up the bond issue of the bonds and take over the bonds and make it free because it is a state route, they could. That would improve the flow and because it would take a whole lot of people off. Interstate 5 — the center. But you know, those things block us a lot. And so nature is younger people still go places all over, but they don't stop at the county lines either. Most of my grandkids have moved out of Laguna Beach and gone to San Diego — signifying interesting places all over and then only come back once in a while for parties. (laughter) People still do that, but it is urbanization comes and high density is one of our blessing curse kinds of slash curse kinds of things. You know it has a whole lot of advantages, but it has lots of disadvantages as well. And we have that problem that everybody wants more housing, but as the kids book says, everybody poops and the reality is that you can't keep putting more people in an area without having to take care of roads, to take care of the air quality, take care of the — byproducts, so to speak, and so something California has to deal with, but then, sitting as an older person here and having looked at this for a long period of time and looking fifty years down the line, I think that California has got a problem that it's got so many problems that it kind of walks into the future backwards looking at how things have worked and it's not looking far enough ahead. You know, I would change things around considerably and because the future is pretty obviously the only place are going to be enough water for the people in California is desalinization. It isn't the best. It has environmental considerations and all that sort of thing, but all this we know, the reservoirs are all going to get filled up this year and that's going to be too bad because it means in another five years before people think it's necessary to start worrying about it again, but in reality we need what they did way back in the first Governor Brown's term where they put in the California water project and brought all the water — stole it essentially from Northern California and brought it down here so we could all live in Southern California. Well there isn't enough from the Colorado River anymore, and even though you can fight about whether well agriculture uses too much and all we live on — lifelines that come from other places, and when I first moved to San Juan, I was on the water district and we were still taking water out of wells and things there wasn't enough water in the world, but now we're not going to take care of Orange County with well water. (laughter) So long term looks are kind of necessary for California and — one of the things that the family assistance ministries in San Clemente does is that when they find homeless people, rather than immediately putting them, finding a place to live, they find out who all of their relatives are, make contacts with them and if at all possible send them back to their families where they have

a bigger support system rather than using public assistance. And I think maybe relocation and beginning to look at the “hey, we got a big country here and a lot of it's still empty”. My daughter and my son-in-law have a place in Montana, so I can guarantee you a lot of this country is still empty. And maybe we need because we now have the work from home thing or work online thing. You don't have to live where you work. That we should begin to look at repopulating the country and spreading us all out some but in the meantime, which county has to deal with the densities that we've built and it could have been worse. The original plan for San Juan Capistrano was 80,000 people, but they thought they would build up front and put a concrete channel in and jam in a whole lot of people. And again, I think most of them still thought that the Earth was flat and that there weren't hills and especially unstable hills and all. So San Juan is going to build out a forty-three, forty-five thousand something of that sort. And I like to take credit for some of that. So sometimes it's not what you do, but what you don't do that contributes to whatever. Like I say you have nobody has individual legacies anyway. It's all in the people that you work with and ultimately, people are going to have to stay responsible for their own, no matter what somebody has done and what you come into. If you have to take a look at where you are and decide where you want to go in the future. And so, people need to get involved in their governance (phone rings) and that's the message. Another caller.

JT: You're always you're looking for, and what you're doing, but are you are we covering stuff that you wanted to cover and?

JK Very much so I at this — kind of reflective period. What would be your hope for the future of Orange County?

JT: Future of Orange County has really — up to the people who are in the county at the moment and I think it — I'd like to see them encourage fishing and float tipping and I float tipping as the exercise that nobody is selling as a cure all but it actually is the reason that I'm in my 80th year (laughter) because I could get out and paddle low intensity and high repetition kind of exercise with very good for your mind. At the same time, because you can watch the eagles and the cormorants and all kinds of birds and such. I think that Orange County just needs to keep aware of the whole area surroundings and possibly keep looking at the bigger picture of where you are, like I said, would be nice if we could all fly around and in little airplanes and look at the drainage and things of that sort because you know where your water comes from, which water district you in know where your sewage goes to in the — recognize that there are big problems that you can't solve all of, but that you can focus always starting at that on the smaller problem and then

maybe some of those things lead into the to the larger problem solutions as well. But awareness of is a big thing and at a time — when so much is fed to you online and through the computer and things of that sort. Being aware of your physical surroundings, which determine a lot of what happens to you, air quality, things of that sort. A lot of questions are going to be facing people these days, and they're things are changing very rapidly, and even the environmental groups have the problem that the chapter of the Sierra Club in Mammoth Lakes may have an entirely different focus on what's important than the chapter in Southern California and so you need to actually not just buy pat solutions from your favorite group, but begin to look at bigger and bigger pictures. Perspective I think is probably the most important thing in education and taught in there just one of the studies programs and even though most of my bread and butter was from teaching mathematics, which is relatively cut and dried. Except maybe statistics. Also, I put a plug in there that everybody should read the book how to lie with statistics because if you read the local newspaper, I would suggest to you that a big chunk of that stuff, while it is not a lie, is not the whole truth either the graphs that may be this tall have been chopped off somewhere, so something that was just a little bit bigger than something else that was way from down here and was maybe 10% different looks like it's twice as much. The people are very slick at telling you the truth in a carefully edited way, and that's one of the things that I'd suggest to people with the breath perspective. There's an old poem about the blind men and the elephant and it still up some time and now I can't quote it, but it's basically says you know that blind men walk around the elephant and grab the leg or the trunk or the tail and they all think it's like a rope. I know it's like a snake, and it was like a tree, that we all really need to look at things from multiple points of view. And listen to people we don't like as well as the ones we do. At least if they're talking any kind of sense and remember that sometimes. Even then. When they're spouting stuff that you don't like, you have to understand their passion as well. Because if you've got a lot of people who are passionate about something that — you would may know is not true, you still won't have to deal with that. And that becomes important. But so, widen your view and that involves not only where you are, but it also is where you came from. Your history, your background. After all, if you do your DNA and that sort of thing, you might find out that you came from Tanzania so you don't want it like we do. My wife and I both have the — so you don't want to be anti-African because you were African. The those are the kinds of things that we have the capacity to broaden our view, but modern media tries to focus you all the time on smaller ideas all the time. It seems like in bits and pieces. And so I don't want to do that to you.

JK: Any comments as far as the hope for the city of Laguna Woods itself?

JT: Well, I think that it's going along quite well. I think it would be nice if the local newspaper incorporated a little bit more about what the city is doing. You know Laguna Woods Law, which comes out once a week, rarely. You know why it doesn't have a city column, I don't know. I would think both the city it does have a channel, a channel, so you can actually watch city council meetings, but they don't really get publicized in a large way. So I would think sometimes it's entertaining to go to city council meetings if they have good debate and all. But unfortunately the one of the bad cultures of Laguna Woods is the three-minute rule that has basically says to me, you don't really want to hear any decent kind of idea from me because you only let me talk for three minutes and city councils I've been on, I've never allowed that. To be a fixed kind of limit, it might be a suggestion and all, but I think we need to listen more to people because again, that perspective thing, you know, these people are maybe sit on a different place than someone else. I see the tree outside that creates a fire hazard because the needles all fall onto the tops of the carports and build up. But only a few people may see that. But you got to listen to that or two, because if a fire starts in a dense area. As we've seen with our relatives of Santa Rosa, the whole city gets flattened, so our problems you don't think are yours really are. Because we have, we have developed Orange County. We have lots of us jammed in here and our problems can very well be the problems of someone else that have magnified in some way and that we've learned a lot during the pandemic and all of how interrelated we are and how we pass things on to each other. But that's, you know, that's not just true of diseases. It's true of ideas and economic problems and things of that sort of the may not exactly be our brothers, keeper or sister's keeper or sibling's keeper. (laughter) Hard to be politically correct these days, but the need is to broaden the viewpoint.

JK: Any final comments in regard to your years of service for which we thank you for your time (laughter) so in service to our community and anything else you can add to your record?

JT: Well, it's well. Back when I was twelve years old. A kid in the neighborhood who was playing with his father's gun. Picked it up one Sunday morning when I was delivering somebody else's paper route and shot me. And he shot me in the stomach and the bullet came out the back of my hip. And so I'm very thankful for the fact that I'm still here, that I—that my doctor, then, was a mass surgeon from the Second World War who was able to cut me up. Sew everything up, nineteen metal clamps on and put me back together again and that I've survived for this long. So it's sometimes, you know, just one thing in life makes all the difference. So, God willing, you know, you get the most out of life and for everything that I've been involved in, I know I always have been happy for the time, but a variety of experiences is what you can be thankful for in life and a variety of people

and got great family and lots some opportunities. So I'm thankful for life. That's my final comment.

JK: Excellent, well thank you kindly for your time and your contributions to historical record. We appreciate you.

JT: Thank you.