

AL 115

Interviewee: James Edison Notestein

Interviewer: Susan Hudgens

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H: This is Susan Hudgens interviewing James Edison Notestein on April 17, 1989 at three p.m. in the Florida Museum of Natural History. Mr. Notestein was born in 1943, is a fifth-generation Floridian, and is originally from the Sarasota area. He came to Gainesville, Florida in 1961 to attend the University of Florida. In 1971 he received a master's degree in architecture and city planning. Between 1981 and 1987, Mr. Notestein produced a weekly radio show for Florida Public Radio WUFT-FM called "The Florida Plant Kingdom." Between 1984 and 1988, Mr. Notestein served as county commissioner for Alachua County. Presently, he is re-establishing his inventory for a plant nursery and is very active with the public information organization called Friends of Alachua County. Good afternoon, Mr. Notestein. Let's just start right in on the issue of growth versus no-growth that we are going to be discussing this afternoon. Where would you say that you stand on this issue?

N: Well, on some things, for example, growth in parks, growth in locally owned and operated businesses, growth of citizen participation in local government, growth of some neighborhood organizations, or growth in the level or quality of information about what is going on in Alachua County and maybe much of the world, I am very much pro-growth.

In terms of things that may have a negative effect, in other words, the simple physical increase in size and area of our city (Gainesville), of just simply adding more and more complexity to government, or more and more bureaucracy, those forms of growth, although some people may measure that as satisfaction to themselves, on closer analysis probably do not have any net positive effect. In fact, if we allow urban form to continue to sprawl and have to deliver roads, schools, parks, police and fire, and all the other services to that sprawled out development, it is not very economical. In fact, in Florida, and especially in Alachua County, all the past errors of poor land-use planning and very shortsighted objectives on the part of those who are promoting physical growth are now coming home to roost on these plans and goals that we will simply have to get bigger.

Bigger was not better. Now we are seeing a need for new taxing sources, and we are also seeing a decrease in the quality of life, if we measure things like human and public services. So we have to decide: we are talking about the growth of what.

H: I guess growth, in terms of this project, would be physical growth that you would associate with development.

N: Another distinction that might be important to make would be between the words growth and development, because those are key differences. Oftentimes people think of growth as largeness, size, physical qualities. If we look at a biological example, all creatures have their natural size. If they grow unnecessarily large, they are considered abnormal, freakish, they do not fit in the environment, or they have impediments in getting around. If people get too big, they have got problems. If you have a growth of some kind in your body that is not under control, the doctors may want to remove it. As regards development, it could be something where you are gaining wisdom through experience, learning more things, or you have some other ways that you are more useful in the community, as in education or a new job skill – it makes you more developed as a human being. You could say that you have grown mentally, socially, experientially, but I think it is an important distinction. Too often it is simply played as a yes or no, when it is really much more complicated.

H: Where would you define or end good growth for Alachua County?

N: Well, again, the biological model is a good thought to take off from. Looking at the concept called carrying capacity, biologists have for a long time looked at what are called the limits to growth in terms of natural phenomenon. In fact, there was a very famous international study done by a group called the Club of Rome back in the 1970s which was looking at what might be some natural limiting factors to certain kinds of growth and development in the global scene. But looking at the scale of Alachua County, some of the critical details, of course, are energy, food, water, public facilities, and the various kinds of infrastructure that have to be paid for. Our economy in Florida and Alachua County is very much internationalized. If the Japanese yen fluctuates or the Japanese stock market fluctuates, it has a ripple effect that reaches us here in Alachua County. So we are no longer as isolated as we might have been 100 years ago.

But I think that looking at the things that people wish to be as a vision is an interesting kind of community exercise. For example, the idea of planning is something that is almost unique to human beings, as well as dreaming and, of course, our ability to converse and write and read and things like that. But if Alachua County – and many communities have done this – were to in a very democratic fashion look at where we are, and then look at where we wish to be, and finally talk about all the ways we can get to where we want to be, that kind of growth planning can be very interesting. That might help to demystify the relationship between quality of life and good planning, or the quality of life and education, or all those various relationships.

Of course, that would be a major project for a lot of our institutions. It certainly could be done. In fact, it is being done to a small degree by some folks at the University. Bert Swanson [University of Florida professor of political science] works with the Institute of Government and is conducting Vision programs. He

invites people like Dr. Grant Thrall [University of Florida professor of geography] to speak. In fact, I noticed in today's or yesterday's paper that he was a speaker.

High Springs was the first small city that began their Visions Project. I think they have pretty much come to a closure at least on one phase. They looked at where they were, where they wanted to go, and how they wanted to get there. Newberry, Archer, Micanopy, and maybe even some of the other small cities are starting to do this. It is a very healthy exercise. One of the things that High Springs looked at, Archer looked at, and Micanopy is looking at – I am getting back to your original question – is that if they do not establish some larger limits to their incorporated area, they have the likelihood of always remaining a very small municipality. And since tax revenues are based on either population or value, it is very limiting, then, for those small cities.

The formulas for tax distribution are such that the small cities get only a small percent of the state sales tax distribution. About half goes to the county, half goes to the city of Gainesville, and maybe 6 or 8 percent is divided between the other eight municipalities. So you see that with a small percent of the annual tax distributions, they are not going to get much. That is why Archer does not have a central sewer system or a central water system of any dimension, and so on with all the small cities. They are looking at a very interesting idea, which is to incorporate or set an urban reserve out to the extent where they might bump into Gainesville. So instead of there being a lot of unincorporated area in between, actually there would be no more unincorporated area.

This is very similar to many of the New England states that have what they call townships. The whole county is divided into townships so the county government would not be trying to run a city. They would run the city services, like fire departments and so on; those would be municipal functions. Instead, the county might do things like comprehensive planning, codes enforcement, environmental services, large-scale planning functions, animal control, operate the jail, provide physical space for courts and public defenders and state attorney and health officers, those kinds of things. Emergency communications might be a county-wide function. So it would mean that the county government could be performing actual county-wide functions. Municipal type services would be provided by municipalities. They would all have an expanded area, and therefore expanded tax base, and there would be an opportunity then for the cities that surround Gainesville to grow and be more balanced.

As it is now, Gainesville is getting most of the growth. Right now there are forty or fifty square miles within the city limits. They have an area of 150 square miles reserved for expansion. If the smaller cities were to divide what is about 750 square miles of Alachua County, that would amount to almost 100 square

miles per little city, which would be much larger.

For example, right now Archer is only a couple square miles. If they would increase that physical opportunity for development and control to 100 square miles, roughly, that does not mean they would have to be a city that big, but they would have control of land-use decisions. Their elected city commissioners would have control over that territory and could make decisions about their urban services boundary. They could make decisions about what area they wanted to hold in green space, farms, parks, all that infrastructure, and the tax base for that enlarged area would flow to the city of Archer. Presently they are ringed by low-value, low-density trailer park sub-divisions that have been permitted by the county commissioners over the years. Children that live in the unincorporated area around the city go to the school in Archer, but their parents do not contribute any money to Archer school tax base. [Ed.: In Florida, all public schools are funded on a countywide basis and receive no city taxes.] All the other services that are needed and have to be provided by Archer are not being funded by these non-city residents. They are also in an income bracket (because of the Homestead exemption process in Florida) where they probably do not pay any property taxes at all. So you have this proliferation of low-value, low-density habitations which require high-level, expensive services. Those people are getting a free ride, and they are going to pay the piper soon. The bubble is going to burst.

H: How can this be corrected?

N: Well, I think in individual situations, [the people could have a referendum]. For instance, High Springs, which is first on this process and may be the first to act, since they have a charter, they could have a referendum which would call for amendment of their city values.

There are three mechanisms for annexation. One is voluntary, where an adjoining property to a city simply requests to become part of the city. That is all that has to be done if the city agrees. Another would be by a vote process, [outlined in Florida Statute 171,] where the two groups vote – the group wishing to come in and the citizens of the city. If both are a majority, then annexation happens.

Then there is a special mechanism called the Corporate Limits Council, [which applies only to Gainesville]. If the city of Gainesville and the Alachua County commissioners agree as a group, then they can put a certain area for annexation on a ballot issue. Then the total number of voters both inside the area to be annexed and the city of Gainesville are totaled, and a simple majority of that total voting group determines the issue.

[The annexation of] Northwood Oaks Pines was the only instance this has been done. It was very unfortunate for them, because about 97 percent of the people in Northwood Pines did not want to be annexed, but because the Corporate Limits Council put this on the ballot, it triggered a requirement that all the people in Gainesville and the people in Northwood Pines were pooled in one sum. As a result, the civil majority, that total group of people, carried the issue. Promises were made to Northwood Pines for various improvements, which to this day have not occurred. Those citizens were brought unwillingly into the city of Gainesville.

Gainesville needs to make itself attractive as a place to live. That is one reason why the mayor is talking about removing the occupational license. That is only half a million dollars of income, but they think since the county does not have it that if they reduce it there will be less differential.

The utility rates are different for the city and county. The opportunity to vote on people who have something to do with your utility bills [is different]. If you go outside the Gainesville city limits you are paying a utility bill to Gainesville, which then transfers profits from the utility to run the general government. So the citizens who are not residents of the city of Gainesville are actually paying for the general government of Gainesville through the utility transfer. It is about 8 or 9 percent a year of their profits. We figured once about 40 percent of the revenues that Gainesville utilities generate goes to the city and comes from non-city residents.

So there are a lot of questions, like where the money goes, where it is coming from, and who gets to decide. If those discussions came out in the open, if the media were more responsible for factual information, if other institutions like our schools and neighborhoods spent more time looking at the facts, sort of a "Sesame Street" for adults, I think the democracy we expect would work more smoothly. People would go to the marketplace of ideas well-informed. As it is now, they are easily manipulated with propaganda and misinformation. Now it is whoever has got the biggest shout and wave gets the movement.

H: What do you think of the *Gainesville Sun*?

N: It is a paper that has gone through a lot of changes. It is an old paper; it has been around for a long time. I guess it has had different names. I think sometime in 1986, probably as a culmination of a variety of issues that that paper had presented in a light that was favorable to a humanistic or environmental point of view, certain interests in the community, primarily associated with the University of Florida management and with the upper echelons of the business community--people often identified as the Chamber of Commerce -- and perhaps a few other interests, went to, or at least it was reported that they went to, the

managing directors of the New York headquarters [The *Gainesville Sun* is a *New York Times* regional paper and magazine. Ed.] and requested a different publisher, a publisher who would be more supportive of the interests of business, of the objectives of physical growth and numerical size, and who would stop giving so much editorial and news support to environmental issues.

So that was done because, after all, big corporations like the *New York Times* are simply interested in squeezing profits out of its small satellite enterprises. As we have discovered, people who have been to New York and have talked to the directors of the *New York Times* Corporation [reported that] the directors seemed somewhat insensitive to the plight of the environmentalists and the humanists in Alachua County. They simply brush off the complaints being made by those who, in many cases, appear to be the victims of a press [that is unresponsive to the community]. The press exists only for those who own the press. When you buy ink by the barrel, you can get away with a lot. So the character of the paper certainly changed.

Of course, it is the nature of newspapers to represent a philosophy or policy which is conducive to what they believe are their own economic self-interests. If a newspaper is making money, which all newspapers attempt to do by selling ads – they do not make money by circulation – then they want to promote more advertising. They probably believe that if there are more businesses, then there will be more advertising revenue. If there are more citizens, there will be more advertising revenue.

Again, you have to return to this basic biological concept of carrying capacity. People who are economic geographers and who are population biologists can talk about the economic energy that exists in a particular area and why a city becomes a large city. Atlanta, Jacksonville, and Tampa are three interesting points on the map. They became important centers of trade and commerce for physical reasons, not just because somebody said "I think this is a nice place to have a city. It is going to be a big city." Usually it is transportation oriented and there is a certain distance factor.

It is like when you go to the beach, there are waves, and they come in certain intervals. In order for the waves to be bigger or more frequent, there has to be more energy put into the system by nature. The winds blow harder, or raise the ocean so the waves are higher and more frequent. In a calm day when there is not a lot of energy in the system, the waves are smaller and farther apart. Well, it is like that in economics. When these interactions of energy waves, which could be measured as money or people or whatever, interact in physical ways, you form physical structures, like cities. The fact that there may be persons or groups in this area – Alachua County – who would like to have a regional airport, which is an appealing dimension of Atlanta, or would like it to

have some research triangle or research park or something like that that they have seen or heard of, just because they want that to happen – like a surfer floating on a calm sea and wanting there to be a crashing wave – it is not going to happen.

Rather than denying the natural qualities of this area, which are really the basis for why people are here, [we should be promoting them]. In fact, there was an article that was published just today or yesterday in the *Wall Street Journal* about Gainesville's being one of the top five cities in America that appear to be attractive to people because of its very seductive natural aura image. The ambience of the University [may be a contributing factor], but it is mostly the natural features, the benign climate, and lots of greenery that have drawn people here.

We also have a very literate citizenry and people who are independent, if not even rebellious, when they are stepped on too hard by economic interests. So it is interesting. Here we have a place where we can capitalize on natural features for recreation purposes, retirement, health care (which is a very important economic generator), education, and all kinds of intellectual enterprises. These are things that can be very strong, clean industries. Celebrations and cultural activities of all kinds are very important kinds of economic generators. Car lots, shopping malls, apartment complexes, and all this stuff will turn Joe Blow's ten acres into a million dollars of profit – maybe. But, on the other hand, there is only but so much energy in the economic curve.

It is like [the downtown district]. When there was just downtown, it was a thriving economy. Then Sears wanted to expand their downtown store, but the downtown property owners would not sell to Sears, so they built a shopping center over on [Highway] 441 [13th Street]. So downtown became decrepit, and they eventually demolished all the old stores. Then the Gainesville Mall on 441 also deteriorated, so Sears moved out to the new mall [Oaks Mall] even further west. You see, there is only so much energy in the curve. If you draw that energy out, the curve flattens down. Now we have a lot of economic centers, none of which is very dynamic in the local sense.

The Oaks Mall, because it is a transportation hub, is drawing people from many counties. If you were to poll today the number of people from Alachua County at the Oaks Mall, you would find that probably only 10 to 20 percent of the people out there are from Alachua County. Most of the locals avoid that area because it is such a nasty transportation boondoggle. It is kind of like a zoo. It is an interesting place to go see if you are from the hinterlands, but many people do not desire those kinds of experiences.

It is a real conflict in objectives. If we want to have higher quality economic

development in Alachua County, we should establish limits to urban services, and we should put up a high burden on people who wanted to live beyond that. As it is, it is exactly reversed. There is a subsidy for people who want to buy cheap farm land. Then they turn it into subdivisions, get utilities extended out there, and demand services. Meanwhile, the Homestead exemption allows them not to pay taxes. We have some of the highest taxes of any county in the state of Florida. We have the highest dropout rate, we have some of the highest crime rates, and we are high in hunger. There is really a great series of problems that can be addressed only by a coordinated, informed community that is participating for its own benefit. There is a lot of apathy, cynicism, and ignorance among the general public. That is why information – the "Sesame Street" for adults – is important. Somehow we need to get the message out about how people can become effective if they become active in issues that affect them.

It is an interesting kind of prescription. Of course, people who support prescriptions like that may be charged with all sorts of abuses by those who are being upset. The old guard of any area resents change which reduces their making a profit. Will Rogers once said, "We have the best government money can buy." Well, if you look at the list of who contributes to the people who get elected locally, you will see an interesting correlation between the contributors, who then turn out to be the beneficiaries in land deals and zoning changes and program approvals – that kind of self-serving association of individuals who sit in the circles of power in the community – and our elected officials. It has been an interesting observation.

- H: A question was posed to the *Gainesville Sun* on February 15 by Miss Elizabeth McCulloch. The main question was actually omitted from the letter, and I would like you to answer it. Why is it profitable for developers to go on building in the face of such high vacancy rates?
- N: That is an interesting paradox. For instance, take apartment buildings. Let's say there are 3,000 apartments that are vacant. Or subdivision homes; there are about 3,000 homes that are vacant. Why would somebody who is in the building business continue to build when there is such a vacancy rate? It does not make sense. Well, apparently some builders have the advantage of location, so it is in their interest to get a building permit if they can because their location is close to the University, or close to a shopping center, or close to a transportation hub. So it is in their personal interest to try and proceed. The government has, at this time, no thermostat on the permit machine. All of the mechanical devices that we use to control our comfort in our homes and buildings have a thermostat. We set the thermostat at the comfort level so it does not get too hot or too cold, but stays just right. We could, and many communities do, have a thermostat on their building permit process. They set

that building permit thermostat at a comfort level of so much vacancy rate. If it is not economically healthy to have more than 5 or 10 percent vacancy rate in apartments or houses, that is where they set it. That way if the thermometer of vacancies goes up and indicates that we have more than 10 percent vacancy, then the thermostat shuts down the permit machine. Well, the people could continue to get their plans ready if they want to, but they would not be reviewed because of the oversupply.

If economics were real – it is not even a dismal science; supply and demand have nothing to do with reality – then when there was an oversupply there would be a reduction of production in order to stabilize the supply and demand equation, thus leveling the economy. But that is not really the objective in economics. Generally, people are merely trying to maximize the use of resources for their own benefit.

Governments should exist not for the enhancement of individuals or corporations, but for the benefit of the citizens and public interest and to protect the natural resources for the future. That objective has long been overruled by organized greed. So you have on one hand the public need, and on the other organized greed. Organized greedies are hard-wired to the system of government because they have been able to put people in who are serving their interests through this electoral process, which is "buy the best government we can afford."

Meanwhile, out here the public need is going unserved. There is a tremendous racking of the natural resources of the economic future.

Did you know that we have more basketball hoops in the county jail than we do in all the county parks combined? The city has a lot of basketball hoops in their parks, and the school board has a lot of hoops in their playgrounds. But those are not county parks, and we cannot use those as county parks. The county runs the jail, and they have more basketball hoops out there than in their parks. So here we are subsidizing bad behavior and taxing good behavior.

That is very typical of how we treat health care needs, education needs, recreation needs, and natural resource protection. One third of this county is what is called geologically a high recharge area. That means that things that spill out of the ground go quickly into the aquifer. Yet, there is only lip service given to our need to establish set-backs for certain kinds of hazardous chemicals and wastes from 1,000 feet of sinkholes and the municipal water supply. Here we are, one-third of the county just twenty-five feet away from the aquifer. That is a multi-county water resource. If we spoil our water resources, sure, some business may have been able to make a profit, but it may ruin the economic future for this county forever. Who wants to do business in Love Canal or Three Mile Island or Chernobyl?

When things go wrong due to sloppy management and if government is supposed to be managing the natural resources and permitting reasonable economic activity, then if they let things go awry it is a great fault and travesty, but still the damage is done. All the hand wringing and apologizing will not make up for it. We have too many situations in this county where foresight was not used and blindness prevailed, and now we are reaping the results.

I think we are just beginning to see some of the indicators. Just recently EPA [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency] or DER [Florida Department of Environmental Regulation] acknowledged that the Main Street Kopper's site is major problem. Anybody who lives or works in that area probably ought not to because of the levels of arsenic and chromium and other nasty substances. Well, that has been leaking into the water for the past seventy years. There are just all kinds of indicators, such as a high levels of children's leukemia. Parent's whose children have died of leukemia are now networking together to discover what the origins of exposure might have been.

So much is allowed. It does not look like there is any asbestos in the ceiling, but do we really know? At one point in time asbestos was a great thing; now it is a big expense to tear out. Fiberglass is another problem, as are byproducts of gasoline combustion engines. Scientists who knew the facts could have made more of a point of what they knew, but for intimidating reasons, like job security, many people bite their tongue instead of blowing the whistle. So everybody suffers.

H: Would you tell me about the radio program you produced?

N: "Plant Kingdom." It was censored. It was taken off the air, I believe, because persons who did not want even my name to be mentioned made it their objective to pressure certain persons at the radio station to simply take me off the air. Those persons were not strong enough to resist the pressures that they were under. I cannot say that I blame them, but it is just unfortunate that a program on horticulture, three minutes a week, was seen to be an insidious threat to the powers that be. At any rate, it was determined that Mr. Notestein would become a nonentity in terms of radio broadcast.

H: Why is Jim Notestein such a bad threat?

N: I do not know. You will have ask somebody who opposed me. Information is powerful. There was not anything I was saying on that radio show that had to do with politics or growth or development. We were talking about classical information about the plant kingdom: gardening, working with plants, and unique features about the plant kingdom, champion trees, the history of certain plant materials, and curious details.

There is a certain reality in marketing. If you were to say your name once a week as far as people could hear in this county, you would become known as a person. Then if you wanted to run for re-election, your name would be more easily remembered than if we had not broadcast your name. So it was a way to diminish one name. At the same time, there was another individual who's name was being trumpeted more broadly, so it had the effect of balancing what was in effect seen by some as an opportunity to present me as a name to the community. Since citizens oftentimes do not realize what their associations are, but are able to remember that name, they did not want anybody to be able to "name that tune." They wanted that tune to be vague and forgotten, and so it was. I think one of my associates there at the station said they had received a rather thinly veiled threat that if I did not leave the air, this other person would have to leave the station. That kind of hardball is not surprising.

At a meeting of the county commissioners one evening somebody can bring in a project to turn 100 acres of agricultural land into a shopping center. They can make \$1 million profit in a fifteen-minute vote. It is amazing how some people will spend a large amount of effort to make sure utilities get extended to western Gainesville, fire stations get built every five miles, etc. Certain people get certain benefits and certain approvals, and it is simply amazing.

I am just glad I do not live in South America. I might disappear. People down there disappear. The guy who was in charge of Brazilian rubber tappers was shot because he was trying to promote the Brazilian forest as a sustainable economy for Brazil. See, if you tap the rubber, you can do that forever; it is like maple syrup. But if you cut the rubber tree down and make an orange crate out of it, there goes the rubber tree. "Oops, there goes another forest." It is sad.

In the corporate view of things, there is a growing trend toward corporate responsibility and corporate ethics in the sense of living on the Earth, doing socially appropriate things, and not doing business with racists and war mongering countries. In fact, those corporations that have been practicing social equity and social principles are making net profits greater than those who do not. It is also true of universities that invest their stock portfolios in similarly appropriate technology and appropriate industry; they make a higher return when they are fiduciarily responsible to invest in socially appropriate technology. [Appropriate investments include] not doing business with South Africa, not making war weapons, poison gas, pesticides. That is bad, dumb economics. Biological pest control is a better way to control plant pests. It really works. Of course, you cannot turn the oil into profits as easily because working with nature does not require the use of poisons, at least not toxic poisons. There are natural pathogens that can be encouraged which are host specific.

Use of knowledge can be a very effective tool for increasing the quality of life and giving those who come after us something to enjoy. It is likely, though, that those who come after Chernobyl and in that general area of the world are going to have to suffer a great deal. Those who come from the area of Three Mile Island or all over America where there are nuclear research facilities that have poured billions of pounds of poisonous stuff into the air and the water and the soil – they are going to suffer the consequences. There is going to be a huge social cost. The production of shoddy goods [is going to beget] a huge cost.

We are going to wind up with a lot of our corporations and businesses and our territory being owned by foreigners in this country and in this county. There are a lot of Japanese mortgage brokers in Alachua County. There are a lot of Europeans who have purchased land in Alachua County. There are a lot of South Americans who have purchased land in Alachua County. North Dakota and Montana are the only two states in America that do not allow foreigners to own more than ten acres of agriculturally productive land. Canada does not allow more than ten acres of productive agriculture to be owned by a foreigner. It is important to own the source of the food. If we are depending on California and Mexico for our food, how free are we going to be?

Alachua County has a history of growing food. It had a number of slave plantations before the Civil War. We have weather, soil, and information energy, so we can be totally self-reliant. We have all kinds of small locally operating enterprises producing, processing, and transporting food. It is nearly \$300 million a year that we spend on food, so that would be something that people could do for the local economy instead of going to a chain store that chutes your money out of town and brings in foreign produce.

So there would be functional open space. There would be meaningful jobs. There would be a natural balance to the urban sprawl because there would be an economic reason to have open space that is functional as a farm. It would be part of our culture. We could have strawberry festivals, pumpkin festivals, sweet corn festivals – a party every day. There would be something every day. We could say, "It is that time of the year for those things, so let's go have a party!" It could be good. That is the vision that many of us have: despite great adversity and great odds and great resistance and inertia, it is still very ennobling and pleasurable to work hard toward enriching the quality of life and the quality of the community. There are a lot of people who believe that this could be even a better place to live, work, and enjoy. Someone has to do something, and this is a good thing to do.

- H: You are working with Friends of Alachua County. In fact, I believe you are the director.

N: Well, by its bylaws, the organization does not allow elected officials to be members. It has existed since the middle of 1966, and I was just pleased that it existed and hoped that it would do great things. And they did some good things. They had some noble successes in terms of effecting public policy. Once I finished my term of office, then I was able to be more active with it.

The board of directors and I have found ourselves very comfortable with each other, so I am spending some of my energy and interest to help build that organization. I am working with them to help their membership increase, and I am working with them to help them get a newspaper out on a regular basis every month.

One object is to open an office downtown. Then we can bring in very extensive information files and make them generally accessible. [Having an office downtown is important because we would be] in the midst of a government setting. If there were a need, we could immediately get in front of government to make a petition or make a presentation or to observe what is being done allegedly in the public's benefit or behalf.

The government is of, by, and for the people. How did you know unless somebody is there to check up on it? Right now, for example, the president of Friends of Alachua County, Harold Graybill, is the only citizen I know who for the past several years has spent every Tuesday afternoon in the county commission meeting room observing them, asking questions, making recommendations. He may not have received a lot of friendliness on the part of the staff or commissioners, but while I was there it was a great joy to see him in the audience and listen to his comments. As a former air force wing commander, he had a great deal of knowledge and ability about the management of complex systems, and his concern with our economy and operations was very well placed. We have a great number of retired individuals whose years of experience would serve this community well if they were encouraged to be meaningfully involved. Whether the government wishes him to be meaningfully involved or not, he is going to make his presence known, so I am pleased that he is leading the organization now. In fact, I am going to a meeting with him about a half an hour from now. It is our monthly board meeting, and we will wrestle with issues of our own organization, about how we are growing and developing ourselves to be more effective.

The Friends' newspaper is one growth forum. We did not have a newspaper a month ago, and now we have a newspaper.

H: Is this the first newspaper?

N: First issue, right. There had been about three or four newsletters over the past

few years that were sent to a rather small membership. That is often the trouble with progressive organizations – they tend to sing to themselves. When we looked at the facts and realized that the cost of printing a newspaper is relatively small, we thought let's talk to the community. As a result, we do not have journalists working for us, but we have people who know what they are talking about write things. Of course, that could be discounted as a biased perspective, but we believe that what we are saying is truthful and useful, and we are offering it to the interested public.

We are putting together next month's issue right now. That is an interesting exercise. I am pleased to note that fortunately there are enough locally owned small businesses who want to advertise in our paper that it looks like the paper will pay for itself on the second printing as well as the first. We have had a balanced budget from the very first issue, which is unusual for a paper. We are not being subsidized in any way. We are carrying our own load by providing an economic service to our sponsors, who happen to be small businesses in Alachua County.

H: When do you think that Friends of Alachua County will get an office?

N: That depends. We really thought that membership would grow more quickly than it has. There are a lot of people interested in what we are doing, and we had hoped that there would be some interest following the election disappointment, that is, that many people who were disappointed would appreciate the fact that I was refocusing myself toward this public interest organization.

We raised quite a bit of money during the campaign, more money than I thought we ought to, but it turned out to be about one-tenth of the money that was raised against me. I just got whipped by money. We thought there would be some transference, that people would refocus their emotions of disappointment to objectives of success by joining Friends of Alachua County. That has not happened quite as quickly as we hoped, although we are increasing in membership every day.

We thought the newspaper would help because we would make ourselves more visible and our usefulness would be more apparent. Because if we are communicating useful information, you can say, "Ah-hah! I would like to support them." Of course, every issue has a membership application blank. I would think that when we have about one thousand members – since our organization is only run by membership fees – the retained earnings of that large a membership would enable us realistically to obtain an office in the downtown area.

Office space is somewhat expensive. We hoped that there might be someone who, for socially beneficial reasons, might wish to share space with us. There is a lot of vacant space downtown, but many property owners have an inflated idea of what it is worth, and they would rather have an empty building for five years than a reduced rent for right now. Maybe we will find a beneficiary or two, so we are making a public presence. We have not really talked about our office needs in print, but once we do that, I suspect that of our 8,000 copies in print – and I guess two readers per copy – we might be reaching 10,000 to 15,000 people. Out of those, all we need is one person to say, "Hey, I have got an office for you that I would like to share." Those are pretty good odds. That is better than the lottery.

H: Where are you operating now?

N: We have been switching our board meetings to different locations. We had a meeting on campus once. We have been meeting a lot of times in people's homes. Today we are meeting in Mr. Graybill's home. It is appropriate; he is president, and he has enough room, so we will meet there. If that is comfortable, we will meet there more often. We had a newsletter meeting in somebody else's home. It is not that we need a big facade or a large amount of office space. We do the assembly of the paper at another person's home who happens to have a word processor. The articles come in, the type is set, and the galleys are cut and pasted on the dummy. If it all works out, we take it to the printer and it gets printed. We bring it back in somebody's vehicle and drop off bundles here and there. It is a very homespun production.

It is reminiscent of the formation of our country, of the early patriots. I do not want to call them freedom fighters; that sounds too subject to misinformation. But the early American patriots were often pamphleteers who wrote broadsheets or newspapers. Posters were put up and speeches were given: public information was very important. Yet, if you look at the numbers, probably less than 20 percent of the American public or the colonial population were even interested at all in independence and this idea of democracy. They did not have television; they did not have fast cars and fast food and all the other consumer products. So it is not surprising today with the culture that we are immersed in that there is a lot of distortion and distraction. To have even 5 percent or 2 percent of the population be interested in democracy or be participating in their government or in their community or their neighborhood would, I think, be a remarkable success. We have nearly 200,000 people here, depending on whether you count the students or guests. So if we had 1 or 2 percent of that number, that is a large number of people. One percent of 200,000 is 2,000 people. If we had 2,000 people in our organization, that is a realistic objective.

It is just a matter of breaking some of the myths in which people imprison

themselves. A lot of people believe this myth that they are powerless as individuals, or that there have to be experts to take care of the problems. [They believe] you cannot do anything about the government, or there are certain things that are inevitable.

Well, that is really not so. Once you break those myths, it is a very empowering sort of feeling. Somebody could have told us, "You cannot put a paper together. Nobody will advertise in it. Nobody will write for it. Nobody will do the work." Well, we did it. It is really uplifting to realize that, despite the impediments and difficulties, we have been able to form an organization. It is viable. It is registered with the state of Florida. We produced a newspaper that paid for itself in the first issue.

I think this history of successful accomplishments in the public interest is going to continue to bear fruit. We do not know where exactly. It is like a farmer who throws out lots of seeds. Some fall on stony ground, and some fall on fertile soil.

Well, we are giving lots of people a chance to get excited and get active in what we are doing to help enrich and improve the quality of government and the quality of life in Alachua County. You would be surprised. In fact, that is one thing that my wife told me when I got elected the first time. She said, "Play close attention to the people who come to help that you do not know. You will always be impressed by the surprises." That is exactly true. Most of the people involved with Friends of Alachua County, with the newspaper, some beautiful big projects that are happening that I am aware of I did not know four years ago. It is really a delight to discover through some sort of networking process that a good idea can become reality if we just apply our human abilities.

The things that distinguish us from the other animals – not the lower animals, but the other animals – need to be utilized more enthusiastically. There was a woman who came to town ten years ago or so who said, "Where is your public radio station?" And we said, "Huh? What is that?" As a result of her input, and of course others, we now have a public radio station that is, according to the Arbitron survey, the most listened to public radio station in America, based upon all those who could listen that actually do. Our public radio station went from nothing to number one in ten years. To have been associated with that is a great honor. I would like to return to the radio station, even if I was just talking about gardening. But I have more to talk about now. Maybe somebody will have the courage to invite me back, but that remains to be seen.

- H: As far as the seeds that you have thrown out in the community, what kind of response have you had from students and the University?
- N: Actually, pretty good. There is an environmental action group that is not a very old group. They have been around since the 1970s. They are responsible for

starting recycling on campus. In fact, when they first got active in the recycling project back in the 1970s, one of the mayors of Gainesville arranged for them to acquire a surplus truck from Gainesville, and they were able to carry recycled aluminum, newsprint, glass, and things like that to its actual market destination, thus making more money.

Students have gone through a lot of changes in terms of what motivates them, which is a reflection of our general culture and society. Right now the culture in our society is pretty ruthless. There is not a lot of slack cut for those who are needy. There are always, I think, in any age young people who are visionaries or who are interested in the well-being of the species and the well-being of the planet, or are interested in having some satisfactions that are not simply purchased. There is an Environmental Law Society. There are college councils. Many of the academic units have good social service fraternities. There are institutes of various kinds of culture and special studies. And just individual students. I encounter a lot of journalism students who are learning to do their craft, and they call me for this or that. There seems to be always a spark of enthusiasm and good energy in the students and in the youth.

I think that is one of the reasons I enjoy living in a university community. I would live on campus if I could. I think it is neat. There is a lot of ambience of education and knowledge. I guess philosophy means the love of knowledge, so I could enjoy being a philosopher. I guess I would be a "green" philosopher.
[laughter]

H: What about the response from the administrators of the University? Have you had much of that?

N: I guess it varies by department. One of the roles of the university president is to hire certain deans, and make certain that the deans hire certain chairman and that the chairman hire certain faculty. So the recent president (and I say this with some emphasis) was sent here perhaps to restore a certain order to an institution, an economic entity that had expressed a bit of independence. I suspect that that former president has put some people in place who will have a profound effect upon academic behavior for a number of years. Certain behavior has been encouraged. Certain behavior has been discouraged. It is closely linked to the general economic community and some of the political community.

But I personally do not have much contact with the administrative group at the university. Whenever I am invited, I always dress up and behave myself. I am always glad to answer questions or to help or to be useful, especially as a public servant. I figure that is my job. Oftentimes I would have to invite myself to some of these occasions, but it was fun to be there and be ready to help if asked.

I enjoyed the Campus Community Council breakfast, which is held on a Wednesday every month at the [J. Wayne] Reitz Union. They bring in a public speaker, usually from the campus, to talk about some issue. It was good just to listen, because you learn more by listening than by talking.

I do not have much contact with the administration. I probably have a lot more contact with the faculty. A lot of our members of Friends of Alachua County are faculty. People who write for our paper are faculty persons, so we are much more closely involved with faculty. Those a little lower on the chain of command are sometimes a little more interested in community activities. They are marching to their own tune more so than others higher in the chain, who are marching to somebody else's tune.

H: Other than Grant Thrall and Dwight Adams, who on the faculty is involved?

N: I do not have a [list] off hand. I am trying to think of departments that we are very strong in. The natural sciences are probably where we are strongest. We have a lot of support and a lot of interested members in the museum and the natural sciences. Agricultural sciences, biology, botany, architecture and planning – there is interest there. There is quite a bit of interest in physics and in some of the space sciences. We have active members in all of the engineering fields.

This network is in a little shoe box of three-by-five cards. People call me and say they have a problem, and I file through my index cards of people and say, "Here is somebody" – either in a department, a citizen, or an organization – "who can help you." That is one of the objectives of Friends is to maintain an active network so that when somebody in the neighborhood says, "I am getting sprayed by Malathion, and I do not think it's good for me. I have a rash. What can I do about it?" Well, we can put somebody on that right away from several different directions. We have made some good presentations to the city of Gainesville, and they should have been convinced, although they are apparently dragging their feet a little bit, about the reality of switching to a non-toxic, effective, substitute for Malathion. It has been interesting.

There are all kinds of circumstances where people want to know [something]. For example, how to get their neighborhood incorporated. I give them three or four names of people who are from a neighborhood that has recently become incorporated. They had to do so to provide some organizational structure when they wanted to resist an unscrupulous developer or a less-than-supporting government. Sometimes the citizens have to become involved to save themselves, to save their interests.

The basic economy of any community, the principal investment that anyone

makes, is in their home. We worked with the Idylwild-Seranola project with the Hunt Club [development]. The people in that neighborhood – several hundred families – have homes worth \$28 million. For some guy to come here from Palm Beach or wherever and say he has a \$.5 million piece of property that he deserves to do anything with he wants to for his gain is meaningless when you compare it against \$28 million worth of homeowner's investment, particularly when there is a principle from the county's comprehensive plan that says, "The vested interests of existing neighborhoods are a collective vested interest of the entire community." That is to say the neighborhoods and the citizen homeowners are superior to the individuals who own unimproved property that they want to develop for profit.

Since this is one of the legal principles of the county's comprehensive plan, Friends of Alachua County has adopted those principles. In fact, our application form includes those principles. These are the five basic principles of the county's comprehensive plan: growth must pay its way, neighborhoods are important, protect the environment, protect natural resources, and people should participate in the process to see if they are going to get the benefits. Well, those are American principles. You get what you pay for; you pay for what you get. We hope that we are not being radical, except that the word 'radical' means to get back to the root of things.

This is the root of our county government, these five basic principles or pillars of wisdom. From those, then, grow various policies, development codes, ordinances, and specific regulations. It gets down to the specific, particular details. But somewhere back at the headwaters are these basic principles, and those basic principles of Alachua County government are exactly the same principles of the Friends of Alachua County. Alachua County needs friends, and who would not want to be a Friend of Alachua County?

H: Right. What do you think of the county commission as it stands now?

N: There are two new commissioners, and I do not spend a lot of time watching them. I do not have television or cable TV. Mr. Graybill is doing the monitoring of the group. There are opportunities now that they did not have when I was on the commission. There is a requirement that if a certain number of homeowners object to a particular development proposal, four of the five commissioners are required to vote for its approval. Well, now there is more chance of having a super majority for a pro-development proposal because of the preponderance of development interests on the commission. That has been demonstrated in some of their votes.

It would be a difficult time to be a commissioner right now because the majority of the commissioners have failed to limit this physical growth problem, and they

have failed to require growth to pay its own way, even though in that referendum last November 55,000 people voted yes, that growth should pay its own way, whereas 9,000 said no. Those are the 9,000 who want their wagons greased by the taxpayers. If the commissioners were really representing the majority of the citizens, which is what they should be doing, they would then impose the requirement that growth pay its own way.

Every new single-family home requires about \$25,000 in physical infrastructure. Schools are the most expensive; about \$12,000 to \$14,000 per home is required to build the school buildings to educate the children in a typical home. That money is not being collected. Nobody is paying a dime of impact fees for schools. So that is why we have incredibly crowded schools. As soon as schools open, they are crowded. They immediately bring in temporary classrooms. There are huge numbers of students in the classroom. Teachers are getting poor pay. There is only a half an hour of physical education a week for kids in schools now. There are no nurses in any of the schools. [The list goes] on and on and on.

There was an article recently that claimed that we need \$100 million for new school buildings in Alachua County. Only a couple weeks before, the school board and the home builders were saying we do not need impact fees for schools because there is no need for it – no demand, no new students. There is this actual misinformation and misrepresentation of the facts being promoted by people in the school system, in the home building organization, and in the major daily paper – all hand in hand singing the song about the king's new clothes, and the king is stark naked. There is a tremendous need that must be addressed; even though it is not pretty, we need to talk about it.

So the commissioners have these opportunities. They have opportunities always to be diplomatic and considerate of other municipalities. But there seem to be turf wars with regard to the eight small cities, [which is] a very parochial attitude. They look down on the little cities.

Recently there was a proposal at the county commission to have a charter review commission formed. Well, the president of the League of Cities, Bill Copeland, who is a city commissioner in Archer, said, "We would like to have some opportunity for our rural cities to be represented on this charter review commission." The attitude that was expressed by many of the commissioners was so embarrassing: they did not deserve to be on there, and they were lucky to be where they are. It was just embarrassing.

But the opportunities exist. Every day somebody can change their behavior, change their attitude, change their outlook. I do not have much expectation for that to take place. They are talking about a bunch of new taxes. The county

manager would like to build a larger organization. A \$30 million jail is not a solution to the problems of crime, but it sure is great for the prison industry, and it is great for management because then you need to have more employees. They get more money for managing more employees. There are fifteen new taxes: utility taxes, sales taxes, gas taxes, this and the other kind of thing. How is that going to affect the poor people? Taxes tend to be regressive.

If we have such a high proportion of our population that is below the poverty line, [we have a problem]. There are 25,000 people in Alachua County who have no medical insurance of any kind. There are 1,500 homes in Alachua County that do not have a flush toilet and do not have running water in the kitchens. They gave a prize to the two guys from Vista who discovered it, but they do not give anybody a bathroom. If you built a new bathroom a day, it would take four years to beat that problem. That is a big problem. There are a lot of indigent mothers who cannot afford a \$35 prenatal visit, so they deliver an infant that has a low birth weight, congenital problems, and the like, all because somebody was too tight to deal with them in a preventative way.

My favorite word is it is a travesty. The *Alligator* likes that; "that is another travesty." There is a collection of travesties committed, unfortunately, by our very own government. But when people rise up to express their concerns or want to voice some counterproposals, they are told to be quiet, that they are disrupting the meeting.

- H: Where are the solutions?
- N: Education, participation, advocacy, facts, truth, bravery--things like that would be very helpful. It is not that any information is hidden or unknowable or mysterious or unduly complicated. The recipe for making bread is complicated. You can pour all the ingredients in the bowl and throw it in the oven, and nothing will happen that you want. But if you do the right steps and follow the recipe, [it will work]. The recipe for democracy is supposed to be taught everywhere, but who practices it? We graduate from high school, but we do not know much about our bodies, economics, local government, health care, or things like that. There are some missing links in what might be constituting a basic education. There is not a lot of knowledge of practical things, like how to put a handle on a shovel if the handle breaks.

But those things can change. I have a good friend who is an anthropologist. He is constantly reminding me that people's ideas are oftentimes, if not always, influenced by the physical nature of the culture and society which surrounds them. Too often, though, what is believed is that the ideas are more important, and that promotes metaphysics, mysticism, and blind faith, and allows propaganda, advertising, newspeak, and double talk to dominate. But [we

should look at things like] what the energy base is, what the food chain is, what the ecology is, who the representatives are, who my precinct representative is.

There are forty-six precincts in Alachua County. I bet you there are not five hundred people in the county who know who their precinct representative is. Wow! What are precincts? Precincts are just a subdivision between counties and neighborhoods. A precinct may have several neighborhoods in it.

Neighborhoods have lots; lots have houses; houses have people. They are just different orders of magnitude. That seems complicated to go down from the galaxy down to a mosquito biting you on the arm. *Forty Steps* is an interesting comic book. But you can look in each one of those windows, and the order of magnitude changes from the mosquito to the galaxy – it makes sense. We are able as human beings to keep a lot of complexity in our lives. What we have to believe is that there is a meaningfulness to this complexity, and we can impose order if order does not exist. But I think there is a lot of natural order or natural tendencies.

It is like the ying-yang. The forces of darkness are always chasing or being chased by the forces of light. There is nothing ever really concluded, because the tendency for people to exercise self-interest always needs to be balanced by the restraint of social order that is looking to the collective good. That is why in a pack of wolves they are not out procreating and carrying on at their own individual pace. The plan is the wolf [pack] has one breeding pair. When the group goes off to hunt, there are certain ones that are left behind to take care of the young. There is a collective cohesion. If a wolf starts acting a little weird and does not want to go along with the rules, that wolf is driven away. The wolves are a good model for how our culture could be in terms of cooperative independence and self-expression.

But it is not working like that. In fact, [because of a lack of social order,] some of the aberrant individuals develop a lot of personal feedback which is very supportive. We are allegedly letting schools do things for us that families used to do, or we are not able to do things as a family because families are by and large nonexistent now, either for economic or social reasons. Relationships are seen as a no-deposit container. If it is empty or it is tiring, you get a new one.

Oftentimes an individual family cannot exist economically unless both adults are working, and sometimes even if the children are working, too. That is a harsh reality. Why is that? Well, it is not because of a failure of ideas. It is because we are wasting our natural resources and energy resources on consumer goods and non-productive items, and these mergers, takeovers, leveraged buy-outs, and junk bonds are eating up the capital resources of our nation, if not the world, for no benefit of any kind [to society as a whole, but only to a few individuals]. Yet that is being allowed by the federal or state governments, which has, again,

been vested in by those people who are enjoying the benefits. Will Rogers is right at many different levels.

That is why I like being at the commission level, because we have a government where three people could agree about something that is good for the community and move to get it accomplished. The state level and federal levels are like flies in a bottle. It is hard to get coalitions going. About the only thing they agree on is to increase their salaries.

H: Are you finished with the county commission?

N: For my district, District One, the cycle does not become available until 1992. Even though I have been encouraged to do so, I am not going to go around chasing districts. I could go live in somebody else's district and run in 1990, but that does not seem exactly the way the process is supposed to work. It would be like me moving to Maine so I could run for the governorship of Maine. What do I have to do with Maine? If I really wanted to live there and decided I knew enough about the area to justify getting active, [it would be different].

It really is not quite proper, I do not think, for an individual to just simply step out of the woodwork and say, "Because I can put together a team of people with enough money, we will have a candidate and a platform, and we will run for office." It does not take advantage of the political process that I think our forebearers really had in mind. It would seem the opportunities to gain leadership experiences occur, when you are young or any time early in your life, by working with an advisory board, neighborhood group, homeowners association, being a precinct representative, or something like that. In other words, demonstrate some usefulness so that we would not have somebody who comes out of left field no one has never heard of before. Just because they can marshal a \$200,000 war chest, suddenly that has legitimized them to represent a political party, to let them run under that flag and pretend to be a representative of the people. There is something appropriate about the citizen statesman (statesperson) who can rise from the ranks of citizenship and step into the state house to serve some useful function, and then return to the citizen role. That is a somewhat simplistic view of how leadership should function.

The complexity of it, I think, demands more of a training process. It would be interesting to have a test for elected officials. Before you could run for office you would have to take a test where you would have to draw a map of the county, name the cities, talk about its history, and things like that. It would not be something that would be difficult to pass, I am sure, but it would demonstrate [some basic knowledge of the subject]. We require a basic test for teachers. We require a test for policemen and train drivers. Well, is leading our government any more important or less important?

That belies, then, a fact that I think reveals something: there are no competency requirements for elected leaders. It indicates that they are not really, or supposed to be, a part of the meaningful control system. What really is controlling, apparently, are the economic interests. The other is more of a political figure that is symbolic. Even though they are supposed to be voting on issues and making big decisions, if you really are inside the system, all they are doing is parroting the recommendations of the staff.

At the county commission, every issue that is voted on has a recommendation by the manager and his employees. The words of the recommendation are all written down. All the commissioner has to say is "I move the recommendation." Someone can second that, and they do not have to discuss it. It can be voted on, and they can get their check and go home. They get paid over \$30,000 a year to do that. They do not have to do any original thinking. If any problem comes up, they ask what the manager recommends. The manager makes a recommendation. They pay him \$90,000. They keep him happy, he keeps them happy. It is a nice system – absolutely meaningless. It is a charade.

The real economics of the county commission are the contracts where county services go: who is getting permission to run businesses, who is getting permission to change land uses, who is getting the benefits of all these tax-supported infrastructure developments – the roads, the parks, the sewers – who is getting the benefit? If you really look at how this economic system is being driven, elected officials are just tokens. So when I tried to play a meaningful role and get involved and ask hard questions and threaten the role of the manager by asking about the quality of his recommendations, I became a threat to the system.

H: Is that also why Mr. Graybill is a threat?

N: Exactly. That is also why special rules for citizens are being introduced by Kate Barnes and some of the other commissioners to limit the speaking in public at the commission meetings to a certain time and a certain place, because it is disruptive to their plan to have people ask these hard questions, like cost effectiveness. We may be spending money legally, but are we getting the most for our money? I kept asking how much we spend to mow the road shoulders. We have 800 miles of county roads with a shoulder on each sides. We have to mow it several times a month in the growing season. I keep asking how much does it cost, but they did not want to tell me. That is just one thing I wanted to ask.

H: They did not want to tell you, even though you were a commissioner?

N: They would not answer; they refused to answer the question. How about the cost of the vehicles, the time, and all the other stuff they do? County government is a \$100-million enterprise. The school board spends \$150 million. The city of Gainesville spends \$200 million. There is a bunch of money being spent every day, and nobody knows if we are getting our money's worth.

H: What are the proposed limits for people's asking questions?

N: Penny [Wheat] was circulating a copy of the draft version recently. I think the people like Vincent Mallet, Leo Cannon, Harold Graybill, and others have demanded, as they can, their right to speak before their government and introduce information into the public record during the time designated for them to speak, [or to speak] in relation to an item that is before the commission for discussion. But that was not good, so in 1987 the manager invited Dr. "Feelgood," Dr. Gross, to come down and psychoanalyze the commissioners and spend time with each of us. When he wanted to spend time with me, I invited a bunch of other people to be in the office with me. We talked to him to find out where he was coming from. Penny [Wheat] had a whole committee room full of folks in her meeting. It was an attempt to intimidate, with a psychologist, the behavior and objectives of an elected official – and this was done by the manager.

H: That was my next question.

N: It was an effort to intimidate an elected official who is demanding facts, who is questioning authority, who is representing the public interest vigorously.

H: Is this the city manager?

N: County manager.

H: Is that an elected official?

N: No.

H: How does that official get hired?

N: The manager is hired by the elected county commissioner. Instead of using our own personnel department, which was my preference, since we have a very expensive personnel department that hires all the other employees, we hired a special head-hunting consulting firm out of Atlanta. They brought from their stable of candidates these people whom they had polished just so. But there is a lot of information about some of these candidates that did not come to light until too late, until after they had been hired.

Of course, their behavior illustrated their suspicious background, [such as] the fact that when they were managers of another county they hired such-and-such engineering firm to do a solid waste management plan. Then they become the manager of this county, and they hire the same firm to do another management plan for solid waste, with all the errors – \$300,000 in that study. And they bring with them their stable of brain trusts to make sure that the economic objective or growth and physical increase in size was carried out – proposals to tear down the county administration building and build a whole new Taj Mahal, and tear down the whole courthouse and build a whole new building.

A lot of buildings get torn down unnecessarily. Buchholz High School used to be on University Avenue on about the 800 block, right where Alachua General hospital is. Now there is a parking lot. Somebody needs a parking lot--tear down the school. It was a beautiful building. The original courthouse preceded the administration building, and it was a beautiful building. But [it was torn down because] it makes business for the contractors and their buddies who are in office--the courthouse gang.

H: As we come to a close, what is your vision of Alachua County?

N: Oh, Alachua County is Florida's first county. When counties were created in 1894 or something like that, there were nine counties in Florida, and we were one of the first. [Ed.: Florida's first two counties, Escambia and St. Johns, were established in 1821. Jackson, Duval, Gadsden, and Monroe counties were subsequently added. Alachua County, along with Leon, Walton, Nassau, and Orange counties, was established 1824.] It stretched from the Georgia border to Charlotte Harbor. The last county created, Gilchrist, was cut away from Alachua County [in 1925]. The judge decided that it was too far for a person to ride on horseback to record their deed. They would have to spend the night in the woods, so the last county was created from this county.

We are first alphabetically. I think we are first for more than alphabetical reasons. We have some of the best weather in the country. We grow more crops in a greater period of time than any other county in America. We have one of the top-flight universities, I think, in terms of potential, in the nation. That really represents more economic relationships with responsible research, but still there is a lot of potential there. There are a couple million books in the library of the university. We have some beautiful people here. We have good energy resources and a beautiful history that is not well known.

I think the native American history of this place has been deliberately down-played. The Alachua was a nation of Indians. Why does nobody talk about that? Where did they live? They lived everywhere over this county. If it were known more clearly where they lived, that land would be more valuable as an archaeological resource. Then maybe we would have more of these sites

instead of more [hotels like] Howard Johnsons.

I think the opportunity for citizen involvement in government and economics is going to get better. It is like that ying-yang, again. There is always a tendency toward fascism. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote a book called *Democracy in America* 150 years ago. He foretold that America would become an economic fascist estate, where business ran the government. A pretty good foreteller! But at the same time there seems to be a growth of this concept called "green" politics. Protecting the environment, bioregionalism, activism, intelligence, spirit, sentiment, human values--these things are not on the wane, due largely to citizen involvement. I think that through communication and through the human talent we have – thinking, planning, dreaming, celebrating, remembering, being visionary – the option is to practice our humanness in this county. [We may be] a small network, but, with access through the tools of technology, [we can reach] the minds and hearts of the citizens.

It is going to be powerful. We are interacting with people all across the country. One of the founders of Friends of Alachua County is now in New Jersey. She really did some good things up there. We are inspired by stories from elsewhere. The human condition is not isolated unless it wishes to be. We are all a part of something larger. The idea that the Earth is alive and we are part of it is kind of an interesting concept. We as human beings are like the cells of our body; we are necessary but not essential. The body can get along without us as individuals. The Earth can get along without us as individuals. But it is nice to know what you are part of it, and it is nice to be a part of this county.

H: I appreciate your spending time and sharing your insight.

N: I hope it comes to some usefulness.

H: So do I. Thank you.