

AL 119

Interviewee: Phil Emmer

Interviewer: Walter Judd

Date: April 26, 1989

J: This oral history interview with Phil Emmer of Gainesville is taking place on April 26, 1989 at Mr. Emmer's office at 2801 SW Archer Road. Mr. Emmer is the founder of Emmer Development Corporation, which has offices in Gainesville, Ocala, and Miami. We will be discussing Mr. Emmer's views on the growth/no growth controversy currently taking place in Alachua County.

Mr. Emmer was born in Miami on April 5, 1928, and graduated from Miami Beach high school in 1945. Mr. Emmer received a bachelor of science in civil engineering from Georgia Tech in 1949 and served with the United States Army Corps of Engineers from 1950 through 1952. Mr. Emmer started construction work as a summer job during college and started his first building company, Emmer and Company, in 1954 in Miami. He moved to Gainesville in 1960 and established the Emmer Development Corporation. Starting in 1960 Mr. Emmer began building low-income housing in Gainesville and later in Pensacola and Plant City, Florida. Ultimately, Mr. Emmer was able to accomplish housing for some 5,000 people in over one thousand homes in Gainesville, Pensacola, and Plant City. This was done without government subsidy.

Mr. Emmer served as an advisor to Illinois Senator Charles Percy and helped enact Section 237 of the National Housing Act. At this time, Mr. Emmer also serves on the advisory board of the National Urban League.

Mr. Emmer's other business interests include Emmer Travel Incorporation, which was founded in 1976 and is Gainesville's largest travel agency. In late 1981, Mr. Emmer entered the agricultural business with the Florida Blueberry Incorporation, with farms totaling 360 acres in Alachua County, Florida. In 1985, Mr. Emmer started work on a retirement community in Ocala, and plans for a similar development in Winter Haven, Florida. The Emmer Group manages about 1,200 apartment units in seven projects.

Mr. Emmer has been very active in charitable and community service organizations. He has served as a president and board member of the Friends of Five, which is an advisory and fund-raising arm of Gainesville's public television station [WUFT]. In 1982, he received an appointment by the secretary of state of Florida [George Firestone] to the Florida Arts Council for a four-year term. He was selected by the Graduate School of Business Administration of the University of Florida as a member of the Business College Advisory Council. In 1984, he was elected as a charter member on a board of overseers of the Health Sciences Center of the University of Florida. In 1986, Mr. Emmer was elected to serve on a statewide professional advisory committee with the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, College of Architecture, University of Florida. In 1987, he was asked by the president of the University of Florida to serve on a

committee for the first capital campaign of the University of Florida. Mr. Emmer is married and has three children, Jody, Robert, and Laurie.

Mr. Emmer, I read your resume, and it states that you started in the building business in Miami in 1954. Then you moved to Gainesville and started your business again in 1960.

E: Yes, that was a continuation of the same business.

J: What prompted you to move to Gainesville?

E: Well, at that time I wanted to do something meaningful with my life. I wanted to develop housing that was more than just a housing project and more than just making money. It was an attempt to do something that was beneficial to society. At the time I was thinking about going to South America to develop housing for people there where they have more poverty than we experience. Then the opportunity came along in Gainesville to build housing for what we called colored people's housing at the time. So I took this opportunity. It was not intended that I was going to give up my residence or my career in Miami, but it got to be a case of the tail wagging the dog. So I moved my young family up here, and we have lived here since 1960.

J: You indicated to me in our telephone conversation that you were not completely satisfied with the terms growth and no growth. You thought that was divisive. How is that so?

E: I do not think that growth and no growth is an issue, but whenever you use a term like that, with reference to any subject, using opposite words is always divisive. So growth and no growth are divisive words, are they not? They say just the opposite of each other. Those particular words have become an emotional issue, and they inflame, they arouse passions, and they immediately give images to things that often not the case. When you talk about growth, because no growth advocates make this a story, you talk about paving over the whole world: cutting up all the grass, tearing down trees, putting in concrete or asphalt, building shopping centers, and polluting water. Those are the images presented, and I do not think that is the issue at all.

I think there are much deeper things that occur to which people have to respond intelligently. You could put up an iron fence at the gate of Florida, like the Russians did at one time at their border. But the federal laws prevent you from doing that. They allow free access from one area of the United States to another. So that is not a solution. You can charge people for moving to Florida. There is a move on now, statewide and locally, to do just that. Fallaciously, they are impact fees. That means you can charge everyone who comes to Florida \$20,000 a head if you want to do that. That means you will only get wealthy

people to Florida and would lose an important class of people that might otherwise be needed. So those issues are emotional kinds of things that really do not add anything to any debate.

To me, the more important thing is, is there a proper way to deal with the issue of growth that is not one that plagues Gainesville very much. To me, the important thing for Gainesville is what I would call private sector payroll balance. I like that term a lot better. We have a huge percentage of governmental employees in Gainesville, far more than what is healthy in any case, for very specific reasons. As a result, we do not have any payroll balance. We have everyone depending on government, and government people think differently than people who are in other elements in society.

I am wandering a little bit now, but I just see the terms growth/no growth as very damaging terms. I do not think they are applicable here, because we are not growing very much in this community. I think the terms need to be defined in a better way so that we understand the issues. The public will not allow them to be defined that way, especially the people who are specialists in no growth. Those are the people that do not want a definition and do not want solutions. They just want to keep inflaming and embroiling the situation so they can gain their goals, which they have done.

J: Who are these people?

E: I used to think it was a very small segment in the community, I am not sure that I can identify the size. I can tell you many of the names, but I do not know if that means very much. There are usually the first names that come to mind, and I know who they are. There is a cluster of twenty to twenty-five people who are generally the leadership in this group, and they have, beyond their wildest dreams, won the wars.

J: Would this include the people who protested out at Payne's Prairie, on the ongoing development [Hunt Club] out there?

E: I suppose it includes them, although quite honestly I did not know many them by name. There might have been one or two. I cannot tell you that it includes them, because I really do not know those people. Many of them have other agendas as well. They did not people moving near them. We have become one of the most selfish societies I have ever seen. I think that is headquartered in Gainesville, but it extends elsewhere as well. The line is, "Now that I am aboard the ship, you can pull up the gangplank," or "Now that I am here, we do not need anyone else to come to town." I think these people were the residents of that area and for what ever reasons, genuine or perceived, they wanted at any cost to avoid development of that area. I know little of the ecological or the

environmental considerations there, and I would believe that a lot of those people did not know these considerations, either. What I saw in all of that was those people certainly believed in obeying the law as long as the law did exactly what they wanted. When the law changed, when the law was different, then it was not important to obey laws anymore. I guess that is an outgrowth of some of the things from the sixties. In my mind, if you have a law, you ought to obey it. If you do not obey it, then you should take the punishment that goes with it.

J: You mentioned impact fees. This is one of the first times I have heard that mentioned in a less-than-favorable light. What is the problem with impact fees in the state of Florida?

E: I think there is a whole slate of problems, and I am not sure that that wants to get involved in this debate. If you want my view on impact fees, it is going to take a long time to discuss them. They are not equitable. They further complicate or impede the process of housing lower income families, in that they bring a lot of cost to it. In addition to that, they are aimed at a certain class of people, essentially newcomers to the state, but the way in which they are charged, they equally get people who live here as well. For example, my children are getting married and need to buy a home. I have one child that bought one home and now wants a second house. That child, if that impact fee would have been in place, would have had to pay two impact fees. Unless provisions are made to resolve some of those issues that I mentioned, they are not equitable. If this new family that is moving here tomorrow has to pay an impact fee for the road, the park, and the other public facilities right here and now, why should not the person that came here last year pay that impact fee? Did only this new person create this impact fee, or did it go back? If we are going to impose impact fees, why not impose it for the last ten years at perhaps a declining percentage rate? In other words, we are going to impose a 100 percent on a new person. Why not let the person that came last year pay 90 percent, the year before that pay 80 percent, and so on down the line if you want to have some equity? I think the answer to that question is that elected officials find it easier to tax people that are not here. Therefore, they would have a problem with those people that were here last year.

Now, if I have not given you four convincing reasons why impact fees are wrong, then I do not know what to say. I am willing to accept them; I am willing to accede to the idea that more people cause more complications. But I am not quite sure I am willing to accede to the idea that they do not pay their own way.

J: Most people will not doubt that more people moving into an area present the need for more services. Impact fees seem to be one answer.

E: The more people moving into an area present the need for more services, but

not necessarily a broader span of services and not necessarily more expensive services. What has occurred is that we have public officials on every level that are not willing to tax the people in a way that will make all of us pay our fair amount. As long as we have that silly taxing system that we have, then we are not going to serve the people well. I have to tell you something: my pleasures come in some of the largest cities in the world. I think that the fact that they have grown large is not necessarily a negative. They can grow large gracefully, as long as they have some leadership that deals with those issues. I have not heard of impact fees coming to London or Paris, Milan or Hamburg, or Zurich. I think it is more likely that they tax people properly. They make people pay an awful lot of money for gasoline when they use it because it is the gasoline tax that pays for their roads and that sort of services. We are not willing to do that, so we blame the new folks.

If you talk about Gainesville and the new folks in this community, Marshall Criser was a new folk when he came here a few years ago [as president of the University of Florida], and now they are looking for a another president. The new president will be a newcomer. Should we get those folks? We are going to be looking for a new dean of the School of Business. I do not necessarily believe the great number of people that come here create a burden on this community. I think that in many cases they create a lot of prosperity.

J: You mentioned Dean Alan Merten [past dean of the business school]. When he left, he was quite outspoken about his thinking that Florida is not going in the right direction, mainly because of what you had mentioned: the low tax base. Are you in agreement with him in broadening the tax base that Floridians have?

E: Well, if you are talking about the article that was in the newspaper a few days ago, I am not fully knowledgeable about that. Where I am knowledgeable, I think he has his facts straight, and I agree with the facts that he said. I think he did it in a rather tactless manner, in that he offended a lot of people that it does not do any good to offend. This is what I would typically do, by the way; I would do just what he did. I would offend them and just do not give a damn. It certainly is hurting the people that he has left behind who are also good people. However, Alan Merten did not say one thing in that interview that he has said publicly and privately a number of times, and that concerns this growth/no growth issue. I hate using that term. I would rather say private sector payroll bounds or economic enhancement or development in the community, because they are really the issues. What he did describe many times as one of the big problems that we have in Gainesville is the lack of a private sector here. That makes it is very difficult to recruit high-quality faculty for the University because, generally, they had a working spouse, and a working spouse could not get a decent job to go along with the University position. I do not think that is a secret. It was not quoted in the article, but Merten has said that many times.

J: To achieve this private sector payroll balance, what kind of businesses should Alachua County be looking to attract?

E: I do not think there any secrets to that. I think we need to make something. We need to do something that produces a product in Alachua County. There is a whole line of things. Most of the world revolves around the computer industry, and there is no reason why computer work should not be here. There are an awful lot of things involved with medical technology, and there is no reason why they should not be here, as they are in many centers where you have a good medical school. One of the major industries in the world is pharmaceuticals, and there is no reason why we should not have pharmaceutical industries here. I go well beyond that, though. I think that because we consume things, we ought to make things to consume. I do not think it is fair for Alachua County's citizens to say, "We do not want an industry here that has anything to do with steel. Send that to Birmingham." We have done that, by the way. By golly, we consume steel here, and I think we should do those things that we need in our society.

I would not have a problem with an industry that makes things in spite of the fact that we want a clean environment. There is no reason why those things can not be compatible. As a matter of fact, erroneously, it has been said that we want more companies like what was General Electric, now Gates Energy, that makes batteries. The batteries they make uses some of the filthiest, most poisonous chemicals in the world, and the Gates Energy people will tell you that. Fallaciously, somebody has said that it is a nice clean industry. The fact is, Gates Energy, or General Electric before them, has worked here for twenty-five years or so now, and somehow they have not polluted our entire environment, even with the noxious, filthy chemicals they use in their manufacturing of batteries. By the way, those high tech industries, as I guess they are called – bio-technology, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, and computer technology – are the places where the money is.

J: Do you see the University of Florida research park as a step in the right direction?

E: Yes, I see it as a step in the right direction, but I do not have much faith in it. For one thing, it is located too far from the campus, and because it has had a lot of opposition. Also, of the mind set of the community is so much opposed to anything. Nobody wants to do business in Alachua County. So I think that research parks in general have a history of taking a very long time, if ever, to be successful. I think we have so many problems here that I doubt it will ever make it. In addition to all of those problems, research parks that are high-tech, go-go types of organizations, the kind of people I like to associate myself with, by the way, want good air transportation. We have terrible air transportation in Gainesville. That is a case for having a new regional airport shared with Ocala,

which would help a lot. Even if that occurred, I think the research park is in the wrong place. So I think they will have a struggle. What ultimately happens is it gets supported by more government funds because a bunch of the organizations that are going in there are related to financing from the government, which is something I oppose.

J: Speaking about government intervention, what are your views on the recent Growth Management Act, with the concurrence aspect of it?

E: I do not have a whole lot of views on it. It is not going to happen that way. I do not know what the outcome will be. Either there will be no building, or a there will be lot of people scurrying around. I have to tell you my personal views. It would satisfy me just fine if nobody else ever came to Florida. I have lived here a long time. I grew up in Florida, so I can be one of those type of people. It is usually the people that just got here that do not want anyone else to come. I would guess that something has got to give, because we certainly do not have leaders that are not willing to pay the price to make the commitment for the infrastructure, as it is called, or whatever structure that would be required with our growth. Therefore, either they are going to shutdown the state or modify the law.

J: Along those lines, in perusing the newspapers, the specter of building moratoriums keeps coming up. Is that a real threat?

E: Well, it has been in the past, and I suppose it is again. More in other places than here. I guess that would be Gainesville's salvation – if you could not build anywhere else, people would come to Gainesville, if indeed it is a salvation to have some people that are not working for government live here.

J: One potential solution is downtown revitalization. Do you see much potential for that in Gainesville?

E: No, and I do not see why you should worry about it. I happen to be a Milton Friedman-type of believer, type of person. I think that when things happen naturally, they happen best. I have done a great deal of my history involved with government housing programs and involved with programs that were called urban renewal. We do not have them anymore, because they turned out not to be very successful programs. Where urban renewal worked best was where the private sector did it. There is an area in Chicago, in Northside and Rush street, where it was very successful. They brought in a lot of chi-chi restaurants and bars--the kinds of places that young people wanted to go for good entertainment. This is going back a long time. Those places worked well. For the most part, places where they had urban renewal, including Daytona Beach, Miami, and Tampa, had no sparkling urban renewal programs. All three of those cities were

failures. One of the few that worked was in Washington, DC, and that was because people in the provinces paid to have high-class stuff in downtown Washington. But generally speaking, that did not happen.

Now, what should happen in downtown Gainesville is everybody should go away and leave things alone. If there is anything going to happen there, it will be by virtue of the fact that private investors go in there and do things. Now, to a degree, but in a program that I do not approve of, some of that is happening in downtown Gainesville now by Ken McGurn. In one way, he is to be congratulated for having the courage to buy properties and develop properties downtown. On the other hand, he is to be criticized, and so are the public officials who have used a lot of public funds, to ensure that those projects are successful. If they are to be successful, then they should be successful on their own two feet, not buy the taxpayers subsidizing them.

J: Is there enough potential in the downtown area of Gainesville for the private investor to succeed without public moneys?

E: I do not think so. That is why I would not have any interest in doing that. Equally bad as the lack of potential is the terrible problem of dealing with either the city or county government. It is a horror story. I for one do not want to do business in this community. I make that clear wherever I go now. Unfortunately, I have a lot of holdings in the community, so I will have to remain here until I dispose of those holdings. But it is not a place that is pleasant to do business. In spite of the fact that the mayor talks a lot about how much better it is to do business with the city of Gainesville, that is a lot of malarkey. I do not agree with an iota of it. The city government is at one of its lowest ebb since I have been here, and that has been for twenty-nine years.

J: Does the county offer any better prospects?

E: Somewhat better, because I think elected officials lean a little bit better, but not much. What has soured me on the community is that what I consider the good people are now some of our worst enemies. For example, take the case of the apartment project that you referred to earlier on the Payne's Prairie, the Hunt Club. There is a case where I have no idea whether or not it is an economically viable project; I think that it probably would not have been. But the signal that was sent out in the current lawsuit between the apartment developer and the county, signaled to everybody in the world that nobody wants to do business here. So that, and many other things like it, impede any progress.

About a year ago, there was an issue of extending a sewer line out west Gainesville to serve a private company. The city got their nose in it because they own the sewer company. Well, if it were a legitimate public service utility, they

would be thrilled to extend the utility line out there when somebody else is paying the full cost, which is what the offer was. But the city acted in a political way and not in a business way, which cast all sorts of doubts on whether or not it is appropriate for the city to be in the utility business. By the way, they make so much money from the utility company with high rates, which they call low rates – that is another subject – that it lets the city commissioners avoid the responsibility of appropriate taxation.

J: This leads to the conclusion that our issue has become nearly hopelessly politicized. Is there any hope for removing the politics from these business aspects?

E: Not that I see. I think if there is a hope, it is going to require Gainesville to sink ever lower. The likelihood of that coming about now exists because of the fact that the University has lost some of its favorite-state status by virtue of the fact that many of the elected officials at both the national and the state scene who were friends of the University of Florida, people like [U.S. Senator] Lawton Chiles, [U.S. Representative] Buddy MacKay, [Florida Representative] Jon Mills, [Florida Representative] Sid Martin, and others throughout the state of Florida who are loyal to the University of Florida, are no longer in office. Struggling along without any full-time president, and complicated by the fact that I do not believe it will be easy to secure the kind of president who will satisfy both the recalcitrant faculty and the needs of the University, I see a poor situation for the University of Florida.

There are legitimate demands placed on our budget by other universities and by other needs in Florida: health and rehabilitative services, infrastructure roads, the penal system, and other things. All of these things put together make the pie that harder to get a share of. There is no chance that the University can raise the large amounts that it needs from the private contributions to replace those government funds, so I think the University will have a very hard time just staying even, much less making progress, like we are talking about.

Under the current situation, if that scenario does occur, then the community is going to suffer even more than it is suffering now. It is suffering a lot. There are a lot of people hurting and a lot of things hurting in this community. You need only to be where I am to see it. I receive requests for funding for literally hundreds – not dozens – of charities or fund-raising kinds of promotions. We are a poor community and getting poorer all the time. As that continues and we get far enough down the hole, to the bottom of the sewer, then the possibility exists for a reform movement to take hold that says, "Enough of this stuff. We have to throw out the rascals and go about being the kind of community we should be."

We pride ourselves in Gainesville of a lot of things. In my view, most of them are illusory, not really true. We call ourselves a community full of culture, and we have so many art organizations here. Most of them are, at best, mediocre. We survive because, for example, the Hippodrome Theatre gets a ton of money from the State of Florida. I do not believe it should be getting that money. I believe that if the theatre wants to survive and satisfy its local audiences, then it should do it with its own local money. We have that benefit of getting tons of money from the state of Florida. The Florida Arts Celebration gets a bunch of money, which I think will not be so long-lived. Several hundred thousand dollars comes from the state, and I do not think that it is appropriate. I do not think that the taxpayers in Palatka and Pahokee should be paying for people here to go to hear a concert or go to an opera, as they can tonight. I think if we want to do those things that we ought to pay for them.

J: I would like to talk about parks for a moment. It seems that Gainesville has a hard time deciding whether they even want one. Where do parks fit into a well-developed community?

E: There is no great city in the entire world that I have ever been to that is not noteworthy because of its quality parks. We have none of that quality. We certainly are not a great city, but we will never make any move toward it. Parks should be a central part of the community. The longer we wait, the harder it is to acquire land for them. We acquire land through enforced donations from development interests, and, as a result of that, they get a little piece of land or a larger piece of land that do not do anything. We are very far removed from having a decent park system. I think that fits largely into the issue of having a good community. But so what? We are short of everything in this town. We have a ridiculous transit system that if we got rid of, we could have all good kinds of parks. We are missing major things that we should have in our community.

J: You mentioned enforced donations. Does the developer have any responsibility to provide parks when he/she makes a large development in an area?

E: I am not even sure what the regulations are anymore. They have had different things off and on over the years. What has occurred in most of the large developments, of which there are very few anymore in Gainesville because we have so little growth, is that they tended to be done as planned unit developments, and the developers would put these planned unit developments in the best of all possible ways. That is the way that I have done it, and that is the way I believe in. I have done it by voluntary commitment, because it is good business. In each of my subdivisions, I have done things of that nature so that those people do not need city parks. They usually have swimming pools, tennis courts, racquet ball courts. Nothing great, but they at least solve that problem of having that use.

J: The idea of having a "green belt" surrounding Gainesville, where no or at least limited development will take place: is that a proper for Gainesville's future?

E: It is asinine, ridiculous, and ludicrous, and it would not work. God forbid it happens, but there is a better likelihood than not of its happening in Gainesville simply because it is asinine, ridiculous, and ludicrous. This was a dream of a hippie guitar player who happened to be elected mayor one time. It was just another effort to stop proper use of the land in the community. There is a current city commissioner who is trying to follow forth in that suit, but his voice is not very loud on that issue. But it is just an absolutely ridiculous thing, having a green doughnut or bagel around the city. It just does not make any sense at all. I need to see anywhere that it has ever been done before.

I do believe, on the other hand, in having land in reserve. Most of my fellow developers would not agree with that, but I do believe that is the proper way to go about solving the problems of too much urban sprawl and things like that.

You have to remember, though, that in Gainesville you cannot win, no matter what you do. If you want to build at a closer density near the community, you are criticized by some of these so-called environmentalist for using up every inch of green space or for overdoing it. There is never a time that a person tries to develop land in the community with a higher density than someone else thinks is normal, that you do not have the fight of your life on your hands. The developer generally loses that fight. On the other hand, these same people will condemn the fact that we have urban sprawl, because you go out and you build on large estates and large houses. I have lived with that experience with some of these people.

I developed a subdivision called Raintree [off northwest 34th Street]. I had to fight like crazy to get a vote of approval to have zoning because there was one sworn enemy of growth in this community who sat on the commission. Because of the crazy zoning laws we have in Gainesville, the project had to be approved by a four-to-one vote, and I knew he was a vote against it. He ring lead all the supporters there to oppose it. Fortunately, the other four commissioners finally did approve it. This was for a single-family subdivision where lots are now selling for \$70-80,000 in the heart of an area near the city. Did we develop that property right? No! Did I make a lot of money on it? Yes! The appropriate way to develop that project would have been to have a much higher density housing because it was near the core. It was near the University. It would have been much smarter to have 300 to 400 units instead of having 90 units on 130 acres. At the same time, by the way, it would also have been smart to redevelop the entire student slum area north of the University and in those areas that are used for housing, where there are 50 to 100 units per acre, into high density housing. There would be much more usable green and open space than there is now and

would provide a much better kind of life. When somebody proposed to do something like that, it was called evil by these very same people.

J: How would redeveloping the student slum area affect rental rates in that area?

E: To tell you the truth, which most people would not want to do, I cannot see anything but increasing rental rates, but it would affect life in a lot better way. The reason it would have to increase rental rates is that you just cannot build slums like you did in the old days. Some of those buildings in there were salvaged, believe it or not, from Camp Blanding after World War Two, in 1945. They still have a number of buildings that were sold as scrap or surplus from Camp Blanding. They brought them in there to house students, and they are still sitting there forty-five to fifty years [later]. If you were to build the appropriate kind of buildings, the cost would be a lot more expensive than they are now. But they would be competitive than the current private housing that exists today in the community. From a lot of other standpoints, it would be far better. If you have a few thousand housing units right across from a place where there are 40,000 people working together everyday, you would eliminate a few thousand cars. If people came here committed to the fact that they really did not have to get to school by car, then they would not need cars. I did not have one when I went to college. They would be within a few-minutes walk to campus, and they could have all the things they needed around them. Where the student hangouts are, you could have them right in that area, and still have a lot of open space and a nice kind of surrounding. This is part of one of the other things about Gainesville that will not happen. Nothing good happens in Gainesville easily.

J: You mentioned urban sprawl as a bad thing. It seems to me that you are in favor of higher density housing as an alternative?

E: Yes, I am in favor of higher density housing as an alternative because there is a need for it. People like to put handles on things to suit their mind-set at the time. One person's urban sprawl is another person's estate living. I live on an acre lot near the center of the city in an expensive house. For me, that is a wonderful thing. Some people call that urban sprawl, when they do not want to be for urban sprawl. You can twist things around to say anything you what you want to. But if you cannot have higher density and you do not want urban sprawl, what are you supposed to do? Go underground? There are no alternatives. You either go up or out; there are no other alternatives in where you are going to place people.

J: You are calling for higher density housing or increased student housing in the ghetto area, yet the rental market seems to be in a decline right now. Is there anyway to make that work, despite the fact that apartments are running at a 17

percent vacancy rate?

- E: I am not sure that that 17 percent vacancy rate is accurate. What I would say is let the free market deal with that. You lay out that property there that can be put on the market by the appropriate governmental agency, and let that guy who did the Hunt Club come in here and buy some of that if he wants to. If the people find it more attractive to live there, which is the best way I know to keep your rents at the right level, than living over here, then the people will do that. There should not be a guarantee of any of that kind of thing. It would be inappropriate.
- J: So you think the free market will be the salvation of the Gainesville real estate situation?
- E: I do not know if there needs to be any salvation. I think there are a lot of cities [that are not experiencing growth but are doing just fine]. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, for example, does not have as much growth as Gainesville, Florida does. I do not know that you particularly need salvation. If there is nobody that lives here that needs to buy a house, then the builders will all go away and do something else. I do not think it is a matter of salvation, and I do not think we need to do anything to promote growth or to promote more people to come here. What I want to see is getting some of them out. I would like to move out some of the facilities that they talk about keeping here, because they mean more government people.
- J: There is talk that Gainesville could eventually end up being just being a suburb of Ocala or Jacksonville. Is that a real potential?
- E: I do not think that either Ocala or Jacksonville would want Gainesville. It is that bad here. I happen to know that the Ocala people do not want to be associated with Gainesville people. I was a part of group that was bringing them together, and we were quite successful. It led to dealing with this airport and some common planning facilities. The Ocala people are afraid of the screwballs that we have in this community.
- J: Is the idea of a new airport that would serve both Ocala and Gainesville something you see as being as essential for Gainesville to break out of its current doldrums?
- E: It may be essential. I do not know if it will happen overnight. No major company wants to establish in a community where you cannot get decent air service.
- J: Let us jump ahead about eleven years, to the turn of the century. You give it a pessimistic view. What could be the ideal Gainesville in the year 2000?

E: I think there has to be a major difference in mind-set of this community for there to be any optimism. I think the problems are certainly not insurmountable. There are many communities that have much bigger ones. They need to get rid of a few of the people who live here. I would like to to send them off to some island where they can live among themselves in perfect harmony with their trees. Then we can go about developing a community that has some prosperity, good things to do at night, safe streets, and an improved quality of life. What one person's good of quality of life could be another person's bad quality of life, so it is all how you look at things.

J: You were talking about government subsidy and how that should not play in the free market. With the rental situation, many people are criticizing the University of Florida for scaling down its enrollment. If the University of Florida were to accede to that criticism and increase its enrollment, is that not government intervention that would help the rental market?

E: I think that it is absolutely asinine, ridiculous commentary to say that the University should either increase or decrease its enrollment to support or hurt the local rental market. I think the University did what it should do, and the fact that some apartments are left vacant because of it is a problem of anyone that goes into this business. They have to live with it. I have no sympathy at all for those who try to get the University to change their policies or who prevent them from building on campus. My view is that the University has to take care of the University, not the apartment renters, of which I happen to be one of the larger ones.

J: Does the University of Florida have a role to play in the commercial growth of Gainesville?

E: Yes, a very important one, I think.

J: How would the University of Florida facilitate that?

[End side A1]

E: They have a role to play, but I do not know if they ever will or can. It takes some very courageous people to make some differences. Marshall Criser made some small attempts at doing it and was, in my judgment, blasted out of the water. He had a very unfortunate incident occur to him where somebody quoted him improperly. It was quoted that he said he was overwhelmed with the workload that it took for him to be the president of the University. When he came here, he was dedicated to encouraging economic development in the community, but he did not do much along that line. That is something he regrets and something I regret. He had every intention of retiring and living in Gainesville. That was before he got here. But after he got here, I think he recognized that it probably

was not the place for him to stay. I should not say that he had every intention. I should say that both he and his wife had intended to live in Gainesville and retire here after he served his time at the University. He intended to be here ten years and retire here in Gainesville, but, as you saw, his plans changed a lot.

J: People who discuss development in Gainesville are quick to say that Gainesville is a microcosm of Florida. Do you think that what is happening here is representative of what is happening in the rest of the state?

E: No, not at all.

J: In what ways is it different?

E: The parts of the state that I know about are, for the most part, much more prosperous. They have enjoyed or not been hurt by the growth. I do not see any similarities between Gainesville and anyplace else in Florida. To be frank, I see the opposite. The people in Gainesville who do the talking are pseudo-sophisticates. They look down their noses at places like Fort Lauderdale, Orlando, Miami, and Tampa, and they just do not know what they are missing. Maybe these people are not cultured enough or intelligent enough to realize it.

One thing I have learned from being in Gainesville since 1960 is that that old adage is more true than I would have believed as a person who always admired the eggheads: "Those that can, do, and those that cannot, teach." I see much too much of this philosophy. By the way, it is a closed-minded philosophy. A lot of these people who do all of this philosophizing are not really willing to listen to both sides of any story. I have seen that a hundred times. There are a lot of anomalies and things ironic about this community. People use whatever side of the argument that suits them at the moment. They say we ought to have equal taxation, if that suits their thing. Then they say we should have user's fees: let the users pay for what they use. I would love for the users to pay for what they use. I would love for them to pay for the bus system, for the park, and the library, because I do not use any of those things. It is only convenient to say that when assessing a builder more money for a building permit. By the way, the builder does not pay for that – the buyer of the home does. So they really speak out of both sides of their mouth, and it is particularly true of University faculty. With apologies, I must note Dr. Sam Proctor.

J: What would your idea of density per square mile in the urban area of Gainesville be?

E: I have no idea. I do not think in that context. I am sure there are people who deal in those fields, but it is just not an area that I deal with. I think conventional wisdom is that people can live on a quarter acre of land and a house, meaning

you have a lot that is 75 x 110 feet, for example. So if you had one house on a quarter of acre of land, and there are, say, three or four people per house, multiply that by four, so there would be twelve or fourteen people to an acre. Multiply that by the number of acres that are in a community that is dedicated to housing as opposed to all other uses, and it will give you some idea. But I am not into that.

J: With the views you have been presenting, certainly the people you have been criticizing would disagree with your criticisms. How would you answer charges that you are not an environmentalist, that you do not care about the area you live in?

E: Number one, I do not answer those charges, and number two I live by my actions. I have a record, whereas most of those people who are doing the talking only do it with their mouths. I have a record of over sixty projects that I have developed over the years in the Gainesville area, including the office building we are sitting in now and the apartment house right behind it. You can just look and see if I am an environmentalist or not by what has been done, not with what has been said.

J: The environmentalists seem to criticize many things. The Oaks Mall is a major target that is often brought up as something that was ill-considered. Do you see that as a bad thing for that area of the city?

E: No, I did not then, and I do not now. I do not like shopping centers the way they are all. I like the European way. That is where you have mixed uses all together. Somehow they are very compatible, and they get along beautifully. People do not have to drive to the store. They go down [to the market] and buy their produce for the day. That kind of life is a beautiful way of living. I experienced some of that in places like Paris, London, Switzerland, and other various areas. To me, it is wonderful. You go to New York, and you can shop at Fifth Avenue and Bloomingdale's, and I think that is wonderful. But society has evolved into places where you do have shopping centers. Considering that that is a recognized part of our life, for whatever good or bad that has done, I cannot think of a better location in Gainesville for it to be than adjacent to an interstate. We do not have a good road system under any circumstances, but where the best road system we have is, the community has developed.

J: To get back to the idea of parks, recently there was at least a mini-uproar over the idea of exchanging Northwest Park for land area out near Lake Kanapaha. Northwest Park was an existing park, and they wanted to develop that and swap it for land around Lake Kanapaha. Is it a valid idea to exchange an existing park for a future one?

E: I think they were going to leave more of a park than they have now, so I do not think they were exchanging a park. I think every case is rests on its own. I do not know all of the stuff that was behind the scenes. I do not particularly have a problem with government buying or disposing of land, or making trades for land. I think they need to be very careful in how they go about doing it, but I do not see any reason why you cannot do it.

That was not the question that you asked, whether they should exchange an existing one for a proposed one. I do not think that is a valid question. I did not read those articles, but as I remember, they were not disposing of a park. They were going to leave some park there, and improve it and make it a better park. I think you should dispose of both parks and schools when they are no longer functional, and anything else when it is no longer functional, and build new ones where they are needed that are functional. So I do not have a problem in doing that. I am more familiar with schools than parks. I think we have some schools in Gainesville that are not functional anymore, but we are still using them – at a high cost – just because they are there.

J: How would you revitalize the Alachua County schools? Which ones in particular do you see as not being viable?

E: You see neighborhoods change with time. There is something called gentrification of a sort that comes to be. When the residents of a whole neighborhood are older and there are no kids in that neighborhood anymore, then there probably is no need for a school in that neighborhood. I have a novel idea, but it is not going to happen. I chaired a committee of the school board on racial balance, which gave me an insight into the situation. My novel idea is that school land should be zoned for other than just school land. When the school outlives its life, it ought to be available for conversion. It seemed to me that one of the best potential conversions is to some kind of office site. I would like to promote that. There may be other uses, as well. I can certainly see that schools where they are, by virtue of their size, could be wonderful office parks or something similar.

J: The office parks would be more like a service. How does that square with your assertion that Gainesville needs more production?

E: That is not to contrast with that. I would not put a factory in a residential area. I simply think there could be other uses for the schools, as for the ones that I saw had become obsolete. I would zone them in advance, before building the school. I would design the school with the idea in mind of what you would do with that site twenty-five years from now, when it may no longer be useful as a school, and then try to design it accordingly.

J: Should zoning laws, in general, then, be more flexible than they are now?

E: Well, I do not know what zoning laws you are talking about. The reasons that zoning laws came about was for flexibility. They were supposed to be made for change. Now it seems that we are going in a different direction. I am no expert in this, but it appears that case law is making it a little more harder to deal with zoning and land use. Should they be more flexible? I do not know the answer to that. I would think that it is not an easy answer to give under any circumstances, and I think it has to revolve around situations that occur at the time. What happens now is unreasonableness sets in because we are in a phase now in our society where selfishness predominates over everything. That makes it is very difficult for an elected official to take a reasonable stance on an issue when they are faced with a lot of hostile people in the audience. That would not affect me the least little bit. If I were an elected official, I would listen to the arguments and vote for the one I felt was the right thing to do, and not give a damn about being re-elected. Other people do not think that way, so they deal in areas where the overwhelming emotion comes out. That is not a healthy way to run a government.

J: Is there anyway around that dilemma? Should there be some kind of appointed officials, or should we rely on elected officials?

E: Well, I think I could make a strong case for a benevolent dictatorship, and I would be willing to volunteer to be the dictator. [laughter] I think there are a lot of weaknesses in a democracy, so that is one of the ways to get around them. I can tell you this: I could eliminate a lot of problems in our community pretty quickly if I ran Alachua County. I could reduce the crime rate pretty damn fast. I might have to tramp on a few people's civil rights, but I would accomplish a lot of things and break a lot of what we hold dear in doing it.

J: Is the crime rate a major factor that is holding back Alachua County?

E: It is a major factor that is affecting our way of life. I do not think it speaks well for us to always see us near the top in those things, although I think that Miami Beach just exceeded us. Miami Beach is the crime capital of the United States right now. It has a lot to do with drugs. As I said, I could eliminate crime and drugs fully. That is a statement I am making that it can be done if we set our minds to doing it.

J: Is there any way that an increased economic base in Alachua County, governed by free market principles, would help bring down the crime problem?

E: A lot of people say things like that, but I do not think that something like that would do it by itself. Obviously, having the ability have more prosperity is a positive thing, but I think that the people you think of who are characterized with

crack, drugs, and crime are not the same people who are going to be hired by IBM. As a matter of fact, look at the most prosperous place in the world: New York. They have a big drug problem there, in addition to having a very sound economy now, which they did not always have. The same exists with other places, so it just depends on a lot of things. I do not think that having a good economy is enough of an answer to solving the drug problem. It will solve some other problems, but not that.

J: Not even indirectly?

E: People say so. It will certainly might have a small effect on crime, and a small effect on drugs. I think the drug problem stands by itself. I see these young people. I dealt in this area. One of the hot areas in town is the area where I built Lincoln Estates and Kennedy Homes. I know the best one of the centers of that Kennedy Homes is. I think the whole environment creates the problem. It is not as easy as saying that if IBM will open a plant in Alachua, that will take care of the drug problem in Kennedy Homes. No, I do not think it would, and no, I do not think it would end crime. I think drugs and crime are almost one word now; they are synonyms in my mind. I think it takes a lot more than that. You might have an IBM coming into town and be such a big taxpayer and energy user that we have bulging coffers, enabling us to develop programs that would make our schools better and our recreation programs better. In that way, we might solve some of those problems.

J: You have been talking about commercial development – office complexes, apartments, and high-tech industries. You have recently gotten into agriculture. What is the future of agriculture in north Florida?

E: Well, it has a future for me. It has taken a person who was relatively rich and made him relatively poor in a period of six years. I do not think agriculture in general has a future. We are into a specialty product, but I do not think we can yet make any judgment as to what is going to happen to it. We would have had a very good year this year had we not suffered a bad freeze. The freeze changed a lot of plans in just a few hours. We probably lost somewhere between \$6 million and \$9 million worth of fruit, and a net profit of maybe \$2 million. This follows behind an investment of \$6.5 million that I made in the business to date, so it would have been very nice to have been able to turn the corner. I think there are possibilities for blueberries. It is not going to be any great thing. It is not going to change any economic climate in the community. What will happen if we ever do well, and everyone is watching us, there will be a lot of people following us into the business. If they follow us into the business, then we will do less well. This happens with everything – again, the free market. We hoped to have had a five or six year window of opportunity where we would have made a lot of money, where we could get our money back and have a

relatively good business. The fact that we had this freeze is going to hurt us terribly, and it is going to prevent some other people from jumping in as much as they would have.

J: More general-purpose agriculture, like corn, will not play a prominent role in the future of north Florida?

E: I have no idea. I do not even know what strawberries do. I know something about blueberries, but nothing about anything else. There is a man who does very well with corn here. He is very smart, runs a very smart business, and does very well. But as for what others will do, I do not know.

J: Will it ever become obvious to the population of the entire state of Florida that an increased tax base is not an evil thing and is probably necessary at some point in the future?

E: I would not put that beyond the possibility of occurring, but people are quite selfish. I am sixty-one now and have never seen a time in my life when it has been the way it is now. People are looking after their own parochial interests, and often they are not even in their own best interests. I remember when generosity ruled supreme when I was growing up in south Florida. I think I have learned this: we are not a people that can live with balance very well. What happens is that we are on a pendulum swing, and we go from one extreme to the other. So I think – and I hate to say this – that we have to get to the extreme where our public facilities are a bust and we say, "Enough of this 'no more taxes,'" and we start taxing ourselves.

I must say this: we spend our money poorly. The government does a very bad job. If I have not been critical enough, I want to be among the most critical of government of the way they have spent this money. Stories that appeared in the *Gainesville Sun* a few days ago attest to that. We sent three secretaries to the beach to do some transcribing. By the way, these are very live kinds of things. I have a theory about what people do and do not understand. We talk about spending \$2 trillion for something, or \$200 billion, or even \$5.5 million, and those figures go over everybody's heads because we do not usually deal in those numbers. But when you say \$674 or \$5,000, or paying a city manager \$70 an hour for consulting work, that is what attracts everyone's attention because those are numbers people can understand and deal with. I got off of your subject in talking about taxes, but the point I am making is that we have lots of scandalous things that happen across the country that do not bother people very much because they are numbers we do not understand. But when we talk about Colonel [Oliver] North spending \$17,000 that somebody had given him for a fence, or \$11.00 for a pair of stockings for his secretary or something like that, those are the kinds of things we can identify with. It is a sad thing, but that is

what we deal with. There could be all kinds of stories about the city manager's being fired and getting \$70,000 worth of goodies along with his firing.

Going back to taxes, where we started. We are not a new country. We have been around for 200 years and have been doing the same screwed up things all along, so I do not see any reason why it is going to change. We have the same corruption we have always had, in one way or another. We do not have any consistency in the way we punish criminals. Again, if I were dictator, I would stop a lot of the corruption because I would punish more aptly and people would say that crime just is not worth the risk anymore. But I guess that will continue. If we ever got to the point where people felt good about the way their money was spent, then I think we would have a better chance to have higher taxes.

B y the way, living in Gainesville, where the major amount of money is spent on government programs of one sort or another, I will attest to the fact that money is spent very poorly even at the University of Florida. Among my closer friends are Dr. [Sam] Proctor; Robert Bryan, the current interim president; Marshall Criser, the past president; Alan Merten, the past dean of the business school; and [Jeffrey Lewis,] the dean of the law school. I am on the board at the Health Science Center. I will be the first one to tell you that we piss away a lot of money. That does not do anyone any good. The reason money is spent that carelessly is because someone else is paying. As long as that attitude is prevalent, and as long as people see that happening, I think you will have a hard time with taxes. On the other hand, if our education suffers so poorly, our penal institutions, health programs and rehabilitative services, all the welfare programs suffer so bad, then we will say that we need a tax or so forth. I happen to be for personal income tax, which would certainly get to a person like me more than a lower income family, but I think it is something that is needed, even though we waste a lot of money.

J: Would that augment or replace the sales tax?

E: Right now, I do not think that you can replace anything. I have been critical of a lot of things, but I want to say in reflection that I think our national tax system is pretty well designed. We have some taxes that hit everybody equally, and some that get everybody in a graduated manner. When you take this whole mess of taxes that we have, it probably works out okay. My biggest theory about taxes is that we, in our nation, waste all of our time talking about taxes, and it is always the same people who pay. It does not matter what system we use. When I figure a budget for my business, I figure what kind of income I have to make and what kind of taxes I have to pay, and I that figure proportionately into what I to sell. So does everybody else. It always the consumer who is paying for everything. We waste all of our energy discussing who is paying the taxes, but it is not worthwhile, because the same people pay the same taxes no matter what

the system is.

- J: You mentioned several things, such as schools and penal systems, that are as much a problem in Alachua County as they are in the state, indeed, even the country. How would you rank, if you became dictator for however long, where taxes should be spent? What would be the priority items?
- E: I am probably not an expert in anything. I am certainly not an expert in the criminal justice system, and I am certainly not an expert in the welfare system. If I had to go on just my judgment, I think we have to put a lot more money into education. This is not anything new; it is a twenty-year-old problem. We used to have a great educational system, but it has deteriorated. It is sad to find out that all of the countries on the Pacific rim are doing a better job than we are, not to mention all the countries of Europe. So I think education has to be very high on the list of where money should be spent. But it should be spent appropriately in education. If people felt that they were getting their money's worth, I suppose they would feel less reluctant to pay. But there is not a day that goes by where you do not hear, "We need some money to do this program," instead of figuring out how to do things better. Money for education is certainly very high on my list.

I certainly think we have to take care of the appropriate welfare transfers. Now, I would take a lot of people off of welfare and let them go to work. I think they would be better for it, and so would our society. But the ones that are appropriate, if I were the dictator, would remain on welfare. I think we have to take care of those [less fortunate] because we have always been a kind society. I was raised in a family where we were told we had to take care of our own, our own families. We did not depend upon government to take care of us. I certainly think the elderly and the people who are ill and cannot afford anything are certainly high on the list of who we should take care of.

We have a horrible crime problem and criminal system. I think we have to do what it takes to solve that. I would be very much tougher. That does not make me a racist for saying that, because I am quite liberal in my other beliefs. But I would be much harder on crime, on the criminal justice system. I would execute a lot more people. This was an idea that was fallacious to me twenty-five years ago, but now I would hang a lot. If we ran out of space in the prisons, I would let them stand up. They can sleep in shifts. That is the way I feel about it. Then they would be damn careful not to get involved in things that would get them in prison.

Of course, we would have to take care of all the infrastructure that is required in this society. I do not know how you would rank all of these things. I think for the long run, taking care of our education certainly has to be very high.

J: We have spoken with Alan Merten, and in his interview he mentioned that there is an unwritten contract with people coming into the state of Florida wherein they assume living in Florida is going to be cheap, and they resent any way to implement new taxes because it breaks this unwritten contract. Do you see a similar situation?

E: Yes, because we always advertise ourselves as a cheap place to be – cheap labor, cheap everything else. Of course, that is not the case any more. Alan Merten is hell of a lot smarter man than I am. If he says that, I would not argue with him about it. I would not try to push Florida as a cheap place to be. I guess it really is not anymore. We can keep on taking undeveloped land and building housing at lower prices, but that is rapidly changing. What he is talking about is more of an impact fee, or something like that. I used to say we should put up a turnstile at the state line and charge everybody a bunch of money for coming in. That would solve a lot of problems, but it really is not any kind of an answer.

I think that if we had that idea of being a cheap place to live, it is not anymore. I think whatever California does, we do about thirty years later, and I do not think anybody has the image of California as being a cheap place to be. I cannot remember that it did have that image thirty years ago. What it did have was a good place to work and a great place to live. Florida probably should have that image. I do not think anybody thinks of Florida as being cheap. I do not believe that companies come here much. They still think that about Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi. They are establishing plants there, and that is a healthy thing. That is the way things become more equal. That is what the free market is all about, and that is what competition does. They will give away plant sites, and we will not do it anymore. They get more prosperity there. Ultimately, they will raise their standard of living, and then they will be in the same boat we are. So it balances out.

J: You have been pretty critical of the way Gainesville has been doing things. Are there any communities in Florida you are aware of that are more on the right track?

E: Nobody does things as badly as we do in Gainesville, that I know of. Maybe Pahokee or Belle Glade. I think Belle Glade has more AIDS cases than we do. I cannot think of anyplace that is as bad as Gainesville. Most communities are doing good things. I am not involved in all of it that much. Dade County and its twenty-seven municipalities have certainly had their share of problems. But when I go to Dade County, as I did over the weekend, I see a beautiful environment. The streets are clean, and they do have good parks. They have absolutely wonderful recreational facilities. After a long delay, they have excellent roads. They have first-rate hotels. They have lovely houses that pay a lot of taxes, along with the other things. They have a healthy economic climate.

They have an excellent newspaper, and, surprisingly enough to the people in Gainesville, they have probably one of the best cultural programs in the United States, bar none. They have one of the finest regional operas in the United States on a par with the St. Louis Opera, the Houston Opera, and the San Francisco Opera. They have a dance company that was headed by a man who came from the American Ballet Theatre, a man named Pierre **Buhonies**. (I think is his name.) There are several symphony orchestras in south Florida, and maybe just one in Dade County. They have a medical school at the University of Miami that many say is equal to or better than the University of Florida's. They have five hospitals. The one I knew about when I was growing up was Jackson Memorial, which was falling apart because it was nothing but a welfare place. It is now the university's teaching hospital, and it has a great reputation. If you want to look at the good things, there are a hell of a lot of good things going on there. They have a pro basketball team that was sold out all season. They have a pro football team that has built its own stadium and does well year after year. They have a university that has continually increased in stature through the years, although not too many years ago people thought it was going to die. They have lots of clean beaches. They have more boats per capita [than what? Ed.] There are not enough boat slips in Dade County to take care of the boats they have there. I think the same thing is true of Broward County. So they, for one, are doing a few things right.

Do they have problems? Sure. They have that crime/drug problem there. The murders they have there are not really a big issue there. In fact, they are not anywhere, because it was like [Al] Capone did in Chicago – they were killing each other. I think that is a positive thing. I think it is good to have that kind of murder – they are now that experiencing in Washington, DC – as long as they leave the rest of the people alone. A few years ago they had it in Miami, with one Columbian killing another Columbian from the gangs.

The educational system, high schools in particular, in Dade County, surprising enough, is quite good and quite interesting in trying new programs.

Now, that is Dade County. What is going on elsewhere, I do not know. I will tell you this: from my experience on the Florida Arts Council, which has been over several years, I have found most everybody ahead of Alachua County. Places like the redneck country in Pensacola – they were developing a lovely new theater and doing very well with it. Jacksonville reconditioned a downtown theater and did very well with it. Daytona Beach has the London Symphony Orchestra headquartered there during part of the year. Orlando and Tampa have become major tourist resorts. Tampa has a hell of a lot of good business opportunities in the Tampa Bay area. So I think much of Florida is doing well. I cannot think of anybody doing as poorly as Gainesville. Even Ocala is doing very nicely. Probably not with the best type of people, because there are too

many retirees for what they have in the community. They probably have not handled their public facilities very well in Ocala. But I cannot think of anybody that is doing as poorly as Gainesville.

J: I grew up in Dade County. Many of the people coming from Tampa and Orlando will grant you your points about the operas and the beaches and all of that, but they will say the lack of green space or the tremendous urban sprawl is killing the area. Is that unavoidable?

E: No, it is not unavoidable, and it should not happen. Dade County had a program called the Decade of Progress quite a number of years ago that enabled them to get some money together for the parks. I am at the age now where I do not look a whole hell of a lot at parks and recreation facilities, but they have probably done some nice things with parks. They have Key Biscayne and Bakers Haulover and Matheson Hammock [County Park]. I do not see all of them, but they certainly have their share of recreational facilities. They have a zillion golf courses and a twelve zillion tennis courts, so I do not think that is suffering. They have all of the water sports. They have an outdoor stadium. They have got all kinds of parks and recreational facilities down there. I guess when you talk about parks in south Florida, part of that has to be the beaches. They certainly get their share of people using them. I do not know if they are suffering or not.

Where I was for a day, where I happened to build down there, from where I am and from I see, I see some pretty good things happening. I see some bad things happening, too, but a lot less there. They have a much more enlightened form of government in Dade County than we have in Alachua County or the city of Gainesville. You may get the idea from what I said that I am slightly critical of the city of Gainesville.

In Dade County they have put areas in reserve. It is very hard now. They have a master plan, and they pay attention to the master plan every five or ten years. It is very hard to go beyond that master plan, so they are doing what good societies do. They avoid taking too much land out and creating that kind of urban sprawl. They may have had to do it because of other needs, but they have done a pretty good job.

I am not as up-to-date on Broward or Palm Beach counties. I have been in business in both of those places. Everything I know about Palm Beach County I have like. That is mostly where the rich people congregate, around Palm Beach, which I think is idyllic. Fort Lauderdale was always very nice. I do not know what is happening lately in the western area, but I guess they are doing okay. I think everybody is doing well in Florida, comparatively speaking, except us. I know that Orlando has big problems. They have had too much growth, and they have not handled it very well. They have not done [?] their public facilities. I just do

not know what is going on over the state of Florida. I know that Orlando's airport is doing great; it is booming. It has made it a big international center. There are about half a dozen international airlines flying out of there everyday to Europe. That is bringing a lot of prosperity to the state.

J: Does Gainesville have a five year master plan?

E: I do not know. I have never heard of such a thing. They are trying to get what they call the comprehensive plan together. It has been done in a fragmented way over a long period of time, and I think it is pretty meaningless because the last person that has a shot at it changes it all around. Just like we have a PUD [Planned Unit of Development] ordinance in this community that is meaningless. It was developed after a lot of thought, and then about ten years ago some SOBs got into office and changed it the entire thing around. Now PUD is one of the worst ways of developing land instead of one of the best.

J: Exactly how did they ruin the concept of Planned Unit Development?

E: They changed some wording just before it was passed. Not many people know about it or remember it. I happened to have been on the committee at the time, and I saw what these wonderful people on the planning board and city commission did at that time.

J: Now, when you were comparing Alachua County with these other southern counties, obviously, the southern counties have a larger tax base. That is not the sole reason they are succeeding, is it?

E: I think it is really a mind set. I do not think the tax base is the only difference. They do not really have a larger tax base than we do per capita, do they? Well, I guess they do because they have wealthier people with better houses, better office buildings, better shopping centers, better everything, so I guess they do. Those things could have come here, if we would have let them happen. They just make it very hard to do business in this community. There is no reason why you would feel good about Alachua County if you are a business person. I know most of the business people in this town, and I would be hard pressed to find anybody who is truly optimistic about Gainesville. There are a few people who are totally optimistic people, and they will find all kinds of good thing to say about anything. Among the people that I know, the business people, the bankers, and others, they are hard to be optimistic.

Now, I do not want to say the wrong way. There are a lot of people who are not at all impacted on the economy of the community. The less traffic, the less people who come here, and the less airport, the better it is for them. They live on the federal payroll, and they do not care about anything else. It is not important for them to have a good airport, better facilities, or anything like that,

because they think that is a sign for more people will come to town. For those people, the quality of life is good now. Having all of this feels good.

I think that one of the most asinine things we do in this community is the kind of attention we pay to our trees. We are probably one of the most over-treed community in the world. My guess is, although I do not have any way to prove it and I am not going to try, that we plant more trees every year in Alachua County than we take down for every reason whatsoever, except for tree-farming. In other words, I would think that every time I build a house, I put in more trees than I take out when I started the house. So we are over-treed, and that is a fallacious – and I am not going to use any vulgarity, but I would like to – baloney issue about trees. I want to say that I will not get out of anybody's way in being an environmentalist. My whole history is being part of the environmental movement. My father was in the landscaping business, and I grew up learning and loving things that grow.

J: The idea about trees, you are right. Every time one gets cut down, there is a newspaper article about it. Is it forced on the Alachua County developers to replant, or is it voluntarily done?

E: For me, it is voluntarily done. If you want to do a decent job, you do it. As I said, my signature is all over Alachua County. I have developed about twenty-some subdivisions and I guess ten apartment projects in Alachua County. So my record speaks for itself. No, I do not think they should require people to replant them, but if you want to be competitive, you do not want to build a house on a lot that does not have any trees on it. If you start out with a piece of land that was pasture, you will damn sure do some planting, because that is what people expect. That is the way it ought to be. You should not have government forcing you to do it.

J: In the development of Haile Plantation, they have tried to preserve the environment, build around it, and keep all the space available for the indigenous animals. Is that a step in the right direction, or are we bending over too far backwards there?

E: Well, they did themselves, right? That is the way it should happen. By the way, they are not doing anything different, they are just advertising it a lot more. They are not doing anything different there than what I have done since I have been in business. Making a lot of noise about a project does not change anything. I am building a project called Bayberry. You ought to go look at Bayberry. It is over in this direction. You can see how we deal with the trees. That is something we have done for a long time.

J: Earlier in the interview, you spoke out on the idea that parks are an essential

area, and you talked a lot about recreational-type parks. Where do we need to conserve areas for nature walks, bike paths, and the like? Does that play in here, too?

E: Not very high in my book because we seem to have quite a lot of that. I do not want to deny that they should be there. But to make the fuss over them that we seem to do, as opposed to having active place for people to spend some time, whatever it be – picnicking, playing basketball or tennis, or just having some open green space for a ball field – is out of balance. Having these active places is very important.

Now, we have all sorts of creek beds. It is sort of humorous now that if someone wants to use the creek bed, everybody adjacent to the creek bed is going to fight it. They do not want anybody coming near their property. This is one more sign of this selfishness and possibly of the safety of the people who are involved near there. I have an employee who lives near a creek near Westside Park where they said they are going to build. She is up in arms about it. She is afraid of the kinds of people that are going to come around there. The same sort of thing happened with the Ring park. I would not put nearly as much stress on that, because we have zillions (I use the term rather loosely) of acres in Alachua County and nearby areas that we can enjoy that.

If you could have the dollars for only one of those two, I would certainly think that parks for people is far more important than elitists who have a creek that they may or may not walk against. If I want a creek, I will build my house on a creek, which I have done. I do not now; that was my last house. It was very nice to go out there with my kids and stand in the creek and look for sharks teeth. We went through that stage in our life, and I liked it. I liked its being clean. But I think we need parks for kids and adults to have as recreation. The only thing in Alachua County that comes close to being a park for people is Westside Park, and it is too small and it does not nearly have its facilities. In my judgment, we need to do a lot more on that line.

J: There is a shortage in Gainesville of recreational space. I was working with the YMCA last summer, and there was no place to play soccer and very little area for softball. What would be a responsible approach toward making more recreational parks?

E: Tax the citizens. That is the responsible way of doing it: tax us. If there was ever anyplace for an ad valorem tax to be appropriate, that is where it is. That is the most responsible approach, but that is not the one we will use because, God, you would not want to do a thing like that. So what they will try to do is figure out how to require dedications of land from every builder that does anything, or something like that.

- J: To say the very least, that is an inefficient way of doing this.
- E: Well, if you want something, pay for it. That is the appropriate way. So we should have our taxes. They will say we are near our tax limit. That is fallacious. We may near our tax limit, but we have not reached it in neither the city nor the county, and they do not want to raise the taxes. "Raise taxes? That is a horrible thing to do!" I believe in all of these public services coming taxes, instead of what they call exactions. Exactions is an interesting word, but I think taxing is a much more equitable way to do things.

I wrote a letter a few years ago when they first introduced the idea in the *Gainesville Sun* of who should pay for what. I developed the theory very well as to why everybody, including the *Gainesville Sun*, should be paying for things that they would not ordinarily think of paying for. The *Sun* ought to be paying a lot of money for the roads around the manufacturing plant because they impact the roads pretty heavily with the heavy trucks bringing in the newsprint and such. You can make any kind of story you want, but we all create and give something from the community and take something from it. I do not see any problem with everybody's contributing something.

[End side A2]

- J: What role does the *Gainesville Sun*, being really the only paper in Alachua County, play in our current discussion? Is it a positive role?
- E: Not in my view, it is not. It is a very negative role. It has improved by maybe a factor of ten since the new publisher has been here, but that still makes it one of the worst papers in the world. I say that with a great deal of regret because I personally like John Fitzwater very much. But I have not seen where they have changed any. They still have the same negative editorial, the same editorials that feed on the same thing day after day after day, so I consider it not very good. I say that with some fear of my life, because they use my travel agency for all of their travel. The criticism I have had of the newspaper in the past exist. I think they are possibly a little better in handling the news now, but it is not a very high-quality newspaper. Certainly their editorial position is far afield from where I think it ought to be if we were to have a community that had more economic balance.
- J: That is interesting. Recently the *Sun* has been criticized by both you and environmentalists.
- E: I hate the use of that word environmentalist. There are environmentalists in this community whom I truly admire. They have a good name for environmentalism, like Helen Hood, Marjorie Carr, and many other people that I truly feel good

about, and I follow their lead. If I had a decision to make in my own mind, I would ask them to tell me what I should be thinking. But I am insulted by the use of the term environmentalist when you talk about these bunch of no-good-doers. I would rather call them for what they are. They are obstructionists, they are elitists, they are selfish, they are destructive. For example, say that Mr. [Jim] Notestein [past Alachua County commissioner] and his company want to launch an attack on building a new newspaper. Would you say they criticize that newspaper? That name is used interchangeably.

J: They felt there was bias in favor of George Dekle [new Alachua County commissioner] in the recent campaign. What beneficial role could the *Gainesville Sun* play if it chose to do so?

E: It is sad to say, but certainly true, that they are the only voice in this community. As bad as the *Gainesville Sun* is, the television is worse. They do not know what the hell is going on. They really do not even know where they are. They do not know they are alive. I am saying that from some personal experiences and personal observations. Did you by any chance watch them on the last election night? Did you see how they fouled that up? They could not even tell you what the election results were. I really think they should lose their license. I think they should have their license taken away from them because they do not do anything in the public interest anymore. They have gone down. By the way, this is all symptomatic of a community. When you tell them something about that, they say we are the ninety-seventh worst media market in the United States out of 187 media markets, or something like that. They are really near the very bottom of all of it.

That is part of what I have been saying about our community: we have a bunch of mediocre people running things here. I do not know very many self-respecting people who want to get elected to local public office. At any rate, the sad news is that the *Gainesville Sun* is the only media, it is the only voice. It is very frustrating to see the kind of things they do time after time. They keep on hammering home on one issue, knowing that you have no other ability to be heard. The only option, the only time one can be heard, is by going to a city commission meeting, a county commission meeting, or school board meeting and go on television. I do not like to subject myself to that kind of thing anymore. I have done plenty of that in my life, but I do not want to do that anymore. It is sort of a sad commentary.

When I was president of the chamber of commerce, I made my speech about paradoxes. I went into the chamber as president in 1984, the year of George Orwell's famous book, and I talked about the paradoxes of his book, and I talked about the paradoxes we have in Gainesville. I said it is really paradoxical that we can get 500 people to come to these chamber mixers that we have once a

month, but we cannot get five people to come to a city or county commission meeting. Those are the kinds of things we have. So you have no voice in the community.

To answer the question that you raised, the *Gainesville Sun* has everything to do with whether or not there is economic growth or stability, or something good in the community. While they pay lip service to it, while John Fitzwater is probably a supporter of that, he has a fellow running the editorial page who does just the opposite. I can show you. Take any week's paper, papers for seven days, and I can lay out what you are going to see that is so inimical to my positions.

J: When people talk about changing public opinion one way or the other, they point to the demographics and say 30,000 people here are students. They do not plan on putting any input into Gainesville because they are only going to be here for four years. Is there any way to get these students involved?

E: No, and I do not even think you should try. I agree with that. They do not care, maybe one-tenth of one percent. That would be thirty-three people who take any interest in local community. That is probably the way it should be. I do not have any problem with it. They should be served for what they are when they are here, and treated well. The people here who can get some economic benefit out of them ought to do that, then let them go their way and allow the community to go on.

It has been my experience in the years that I have been here that that one-tenth of 1 percent that does get involved is almost always in a very negative way. I rarely see any constructiveness on the part of these people. They have a professor who gets them involved in the environmental movement, and they go down to the city or county commission. They do not have any idea of what is going on, but they make a lot of noise, sound learned, and go on from there.

I do not want to create a bias in you by saying that I am against everything like that. I am not. I am an open-minded person, and I like to listen to the convincing arguments on both sides. So I would welcome students with an intelligent voice. But I just have to tell you, and you are putting me on the record, so I need to be honest before anything else, I just do not have a hell of a lot of respect for what I see done by the students in the community. Once in a while I will pick up the [*Florida Independent*] *Alligator*. I will look at some of the stuff in there and ask myself, "My God. Were we that bad when we were students?" I know that what you think when you are eighteen and twenty years old. The thing was memorialized in the poem:

"A sophomore stood on the railroad track.
"The train was coming fast.

“The train got off the railroad track
“to let the sophomore pass.”

I think that this is what the image is. You think you are at the height your intelligence. You are more sure of yourself than ever in your life when you are eighteen, nineteen, and twenty years old, although probably with less reason to be that way. I think the people should be welcomed, and if they want to be part of the community, then fine. Nothing should happen to either make them or exclude them from that.

J: Voter apathy is certainly not confined to Alachua county, but it is one reason why you are seeing ineffective city and county governments. How can Alachua County's concerned citizens do something about this?

E: There is a way, and I had a way. I tried to make it work with a small group of people this last election. But it would take more dedication than I and this group of people were willing to commit. It is the same way that this group of people that you mistakenly call environmentalists and I call obstructionists have done. They did a lot of networking, and you made sure their people voted. I think we others who are on the other side of the fence need to do the same. I wanted to get 10,000 people together who had similar thoughts and make sure that every one of those 10,000 people voted on election day, much like the systems that have been used in all the corrupt political areas of the country. like Chicago and Newark, New Jersey. They organize everybody in the precincts and make sure that they all voted on election day. I think that it can be done, but I have given up the idea of going any further with that. I am removing myself from that arena. But it could be done that way. In other words, a group of people could do that.

J: So you think that the prospect of improving the situation for a long-term citizen moving to Gainesville and living here for awhile are rather dim?

E: It depends upon who the person is. If it is a retiree, who does not want any changes, that is fine. For a doctor moving in here and getting involved with one of the hospitals, that could be very good. He may build a \$300,000 house, and that would be fine. For what my business community thinks this community as a whole should be, I think it is terribly dismal.

J: If you were the president of a new computer company, Gainesville would not be high on your list for relocation?

E: Not if I knew the facts. If I knew the facts, it would be last. If I had gone to the city, learned what would be required of me, found out what it costs to build a home in Gainesville (where it ought to be cheap), found out about our transportation facilities, our parks, our roads, and about all of those things, I would not want to be here. I might not opt for Miami, either, but I would not pick

this place.

J: Ocala, perhaps?

E: I do not know enough about it to say. I am in business in Ocala, but I do not think that that would be the best place in the world to live, either. I am not prepared for that. I do not know the answer to that. Jacksonville, which was a pure sewer when I first came to Gainesville and smelled like one, is probably a hell of a lot better place now. I would certainly think of that. Jacksonville has a lot things going for it now. Gainesville has the University going for it, but has so many things against it, it has abdicated all the rest of it.

J: To conclude, for the record, do you have any advice for the people of Gainesville that they should listen to?

E: I cannot do that in any summary. I would not be a very good one to go on television for ten seconds or a news bite, but yes, there is a lot of advice. Some of it has been already been said in this interview. I think you should start with elected officials who have the same kind of community goals and the same kind of vision. You first have to ask where you want to be and what you want to be. Having said that, the next task is deciding how you are going to get there. You certainly have to involve the community, and in a positive way. I see no way of doing that in Gainesville now. It is too divisive, and nothing has changed to make it get together. There have been many attempts made, but none of them worked.

I do have one comment that I will make. If every business company in this community would stop all contributions to all of these charitable organizations, it would take about three months for all of these charities to die on the vine. Then they would recognize that they cannot do without business. I would make them pay the price of our support. I myself have done that to the degree I can. First of all, because of my business investments, I am not able to contribute much. What I have done is make a very large contribution to the University of Florida last year, and I cut out a lot of this other stuff that really gets nowhere. So I think that if that were to happen, if every bank and every business were to stop funding all of these things, it would not take long for them to say, "Listen. You need to help us. It has to be a two-way street." When I was president of the chamber and a member of the arts council, I tried to promote that two-way street program, but it worked only one way. It brought the business community into the arts, but not the arts into business.

J: Thank you very much, Mr. Emmer, for your time.

E: I have enjoyed it.

AL 119
Page 34

[End of the interview]