

Henderson Memories:

**City of
Henderson
Living Histories**

CITY OF HENDERSON
LIVING HISTORY INTERVIEW
CITY MANAGER PHIL SPEIGHT
MARCH 20, 2003
PART 1

1 INTERVIEWER: Can you start by telling me your name and what you
2 do?

3 MR. SPEIGHT: Phil Speight, City Manager.

4 INTERVIEWER: What does city manager do in Henderson?

5 MR. SPEIGHT: Handles the day-to-day operations of the organization.

6 INTERVIEWER: Of the entire city -- all the city operations?

7 MR. SPEIGHT: Yeah, except for two employees. Everybody else is
8 responsible to me.

9 INTERVIEWER: Um, our, I guess, particular focus is the history of
10 Henderson, you know, and looking at some of the growth. What do you have
11 to do specifically, I guess, with development in Henderson?

12 MR. SPEIGHT: As far as growth is concerned I'm usually involved with
13 the development process in that the developers have to come in and deal
14 with staff members and I'm involved in meetings as it relates to the types of
15 development taking place. But primarily my responsibility will be deal on a
16 regional basis with those entities that are involved with development such as
17 the BLM, the Southern Nevada Water Authority, the Southern Nevada
18 Regional Planning Coalition, all of those organizations now which were a part,
19 and those are primarily my responsibilities.

20 INTERVIEWER: In terms of the growth of the city, I guess, Henderson
21 has expanded a lot over the years by annexing properties and is the fastest
22 growing city in the United States. Is that part of what you've been involved in,

1 in looking at new areas and seeing what you need to do to keep that growth
2 going?

3 MR. SPEIGHT: Right. I think that part of the responsibility has been,
4 most recently, relating to the Southern Nevada Public Lands Act, is dealing
5 with the Washington congressional delegation in an effort to ensure that the
6 mayor and council in future years has a legacy of future property to develop
7 and not being in a position of having everything developed out and nothing to
8 look forward to. Because if we were in a position of not moving ahead with
9 growth there would be a point where it would become stagnant and revenues
10 would start to be reduced and we would have to start looking at layoffs and
11 cutting services.

12 INTERVIEWER: How do some of these annexations happen? I mean,
13 things that I'm familiar with in the history of Henderson was the original 7,000
14 acres and then 16,000 acres that came from the federal government. Does
15 the federal government just come along and say do you want some land? Or
16 is there more of a process to it than that?

17 MR. SPEIGHT: Well, most recently it's been a process of having the
18 BLM sell their properties and we've been very interested in having those
19 properties located within the city of Henderson primarily because it allows us
20 to dictate the type of development that will take place on those properties.
21 Previously, I think, there's been times when the BLM has released property
22 for public sale and that has been purchased by a public developer and then
23 they've dealt with other entities other than the city of Henderson in close

1 proximity to our borders, and it hasn't been in the best interest of our
2 community.

3 INTERVIEWER: When you talk about the best interest of your
4 community, I guess as I'm learning more about Henderson I see it as a very
5 family-oriented community. You have certain restrictions on development in
6 terms of the way you want the streets to be. If you're talking to a current city
7 of Henderson resident and saying, you know, here's our vision of this
8 community and here's how we try to translate it into some of its future
9 development, what would you want to say to them?

10 MR. SPEIGHT: Well, I think the quality of life issues are very important
11 to this mayor and council and the community as a whole. I think the parks and
12 recreation amenities are extremely important. Open space is very important.
13 The view that you get as you drive around the city of Henderson is pretty
14 distinctive compared to other areas of the valley. I think one of the best
15 examples you can look at is differences between one side of Eastern Avenue
16 and another side of Eastern Avenue, one being in the County, one being in
17 the city of Henderson. And there are dramatic differences between the two.
18 Not that one is better, one is worse. I think it's basically one fits our vision that
19 the council has developed, the other one is primarily under the jurisdiction of
20 the County Commissioners, and one may be thinking that the best thing to do
21 is to ensure that your community has reached that vision. And it's more
22 expensive to develop in the city of Henderson for a developer, and we
23 understand that. But I think that developers are interested in coming to the

1 city of Henderson because we have had a real political will on the part of the
2 council to ensure that high-quality development takes place, and that will
3 include giving up portions of property for school sites and park sites and that's
4 the cost of doing business in our community.

5 INTERVIEWER: Where is the city of Henderson looking right now in
6 terms of some of its immediate, next growth?

7 MR. SPEIGHT: Well, the next growth we'll have is what we call the
8 Southwest Henderson area. That is, primarily, east of Las Vegas Boulevard,
9 south of St. Rose Parkway, all the way down to what is commonly referred to
10 as the disposal area boundary, which is essentially as far south as Anthem
11 goes in a straight line heading westerly to Las Vegas Boulevard, which
12 basically takes you down to Wheeler's RV. That area encompasses about
13 6,000 acres. That will be the next area of our growth. That is scheduled to go
14 on sale in November of 2003, and we would anticipate that the first people
15 living in that area is about 24 months away.

16 INTERVIEWER: Do you think that's important just in keeping the
17 momentum of the city going?

18 MR. SPEIGHT: I think it's important in keeping the momentum going. I
19 think it's important, as you said earlier, to protect our gateways. I think it's
20 also very important to protect the future of this community in providing an
21 ability to continue to grow. That area is going to be looked at as the stepping
22 stone to launch us in whatever direction the mayor and council decide to go.

1 INTERVIEWER: Obviously, Henderson's growth has been dynamic
2 over the last several years or decades. When you look at the 60s, the 70s,
3 the 80s, and 90s, is there any part of that that you would say would be the
4 most dynamic?

5 MR. SPEIGHT: Oh, I think the 90s were the most dynamic. I mean, I
6 was hired in 1988, so I really can't speak to what it was like in the 60s and the
7 70s. I can tell you that when I arrived here we had approximately 46,000
8 people. We have about 220,000 today. Nowhere in the United States grew
9 faster than we did between 1990 and 2000. We grew at over 225%. I think
10 that that challenge was one that was accepted pretty readily by the staff, and I
11 think they've proven their abilities by having some of the best and highest-
12 class development anywhere in the United States. I think that that was really
13 the most fun.

14 When you look back at starting in 1990 and seeing the things grow and
15 making sure that, what we consider the Green Valley side of town, didn't have
16 everything and trying to balance between that side of town and this side of
17 town and seeing Lake Las Vegas come out with their development and
18 seeing Seven Hills and the improvements to -- when we hit 100,000 people it
19 really became evident that commercial developers were very interested in our
20 community. You didn't have to go out of town anymore to have a meal, to buy
21 Levi's, to get a suit. Everybody was really interested in coming to Henderson,
22 and now we've got the Sunset corridor and the Stephanie corridor, two of the
23 busiest commercial areas in the state of Nevada.

1 INTERVIEWER: When was the milestone of reaching 100,000 people
2 and what did that do in changing the city?

3 MR. SPEIGHT: Really one of the biggest milestones for this
4 community was when we reached 100,000 people in population. I think those
5 rooftops really gave impetus to the commercial development that we now see
6 on Stephanie and Sunset. The Galleria Mall and the Sunset corridor with the
7 major independent stores that are there really came to fruition simply because
8 we reached that magic number where the customer base was large enough
9 to allow those people to come into town. They saw that this was the next
10 place to be simply because the market was here, and it allowed our residents
11 then not to have to leave our community to do their shopping. And when you
12 saw Costco come into town, you saw the Sunset Station start to be built -- I
13 mean, I think that all those kind of things really kind of jettisoned us off in a
14 different direction.

15 INTERVIEWER: You know, you talk about the Sunset and Stephanie
16 development; was Sunset Station a big deal for Henderson?

17 MR. SPEIGHT: I think Sunset Station was a very big deal. I mean, it
18 really kind of put us on the map of having a large casino-hotel.

19 Now one of the things that I was thinking about as one of those other
20 major events that took place -- I can remember sitting in Jokers Wild and
21 Jokers Wild was the first escalator in the city of Henderson. And when you
22 think back now to what's occurred in this community, the Jokers Wild having
23 its first escalator is a little bit different than the city of Henderson having its

1 first Ritz Carlton. So I think that you can kind of see the difference between
2 what we looked at as being major milestones years and years ago as to what
3 we looked at today and you saw that - - in 1996, I believe it was, when we
4 had the opening of Sunset Station. It was a very big deal for us.

5 INTERVIEWER: When you look at the city of Henderson being such a
6 new city, you know, 50 years. How does that benefit these residents as
7 opposed to other cities in the United States?

8 MR. SPEIGHT: Well, I think that the newness and the growth that has
9 occurred has really benefited all of us. I don't think we'd have the types of
10 parks and amenities that we have today, the types of infrastructure we have
11 today, the open areas, the - - those kinds of things would not be here - - the
12 facilities that we have to look at as government-type facilities. If we hadn't
13 had the growth, I think that if you look at the way - - and this isn't meant to be
14 derogatory in any way - - but if you look at the way Boulder City looks today,
15 versus the way they did 50 years ago, there's not much difference. And I
16 think, if you look at our community, then there's a big difference between what
17 we looked like 15 years ago and what we like today. I think a lot of that is
18 really provided to us because of the growth that's occurred.