

Henderson Libraries

Henderson Oral History Project

Gary Johnson

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Interviewer: So today is Wednesday, October 19, 2011. We're at the Paseo Verde Library branch of the Henderson District Public Libraries in Henderson, Nevada. My name is Wendy Walker, and our cameraman is Ed Feldman. And today we are interviewing Gary Johnson. So thank you very much for participating in the Henderson Libraries' Henderson Oral Histories Project, and to begin we're just going to start with a few basics. So can you tell me where and when you were born?

Gary: I was born in San Francisco, California in 1942 and lived there all of my life until 1959, '58, '59 when I moved to Henderson. My parents, my grandparents lived in Henderson, and my folks were getting ready to go through a divorce, so I came down here to kinda, you know, be out of the way. And arrived here, and I think it was in July, and that's when the McCarran Airport was on Las Vegas Boulevard, just across the field there, no terminal, I mean. And it was overcast, and I was looking out the window and started off the plane and I was assuming overcast – San Francisco, cooler weather – it was like, oh my gosh, and I thought, 'cuz I was 16, I thought, well, it must be the heat from the engines, couldn't possibly be the temperature. So I, when I walked down the stairs and started across, I said, holy cow, I'm not staying here very long. You know, this is like living on the moon. You know, there wasn't much vegetation, there wasn't a lot of things, and so it was a shock. It was a big shock. So I wound up staying with her, my grandparents. They lived on Carson Way, which is just off Van Wagenen. And stayed there, and then went to Las Vegas High School and graduated in '63 and got married and had a child and all that stuff, you know, but it was...and I was like, gosh, there's nothing to do out here almost, but it was an interesting, interesting time. As you were saying, you know you had the lights at nighttime, you had the little lights out here in Henderson and there was all this black area and then lights in here which was the City of Las Vegas. There was nothing in between. Boulder Highway was the only connector between the two communities. It was amazing, it really was. BMI was Basic Management, was going great guns at that time, and so it was still a little factory town.

Interviewer: So how long had your grandparents been here?

Gary: They were here, they came here in the early '50s and bought a brand new house. It was... most houses had swamp coolers here and this had air conditioning. And so they bought the house and that's how they wound up here. They got to...they were kinda pioneer kinda, they sold everything in San Francisco and just hopped in the car and took off and when they got to Bakersfield they just said, we're gonna flip a coin. It'll be either Mexico or Las Vegas. That's how they got here.

Interviewer: Wow. Did they have any jobs in mind or were they just going to find someplace new to live?

Gary: No. Just new place to live.

Interviewer: So you were high school-age when you moved here.

Gary: I was.

Interviewer: And why did you go to Las Vegas High School instead of Basic High School?

Gary: Well, because I found out that the...well, Basic, I, I, you know, the name Basic kinda sounded basic, and so, so I wound up going to Las Vegas High School. It was, you know, it was OK. Yeah, it was more of an identity thing.

Interviewer: And how did you get to school and back? Did you...?

Gary: My grandmother drove me back and forth a while until I...she co-signed me for a car. It was a '58 Edsel, and I drove back and forth in a '58 Edsel, you know, and that was great.

Interviewer: How long did it take you to get to school?

Gary: It took me about, let's see I'd go down Boulder Highway, well, just all the way down to Five Points, which is Charleston, Fremont, and you know, and the Boulder Highway came together where the Showboat Hotel used to be. And it would take me about 20 minutes, 25 minutes.

Interviewer: So Boulder Highway was, was different then. There weren't as many lights. Can you describe...?

Gary: There weren't any lights.

Interviewer: No lights at all?

Gary: Mm-mmm.

Interviewer: So it was just sort of, it was a highway, just smooth sailing.

Gary: It was just get on it and go. You know, that was it.

Interviewer: But were there very many businesses on the sides of the road or...?

Gary: Not too many. East Las Vegas has some businesses. East Las Vegas was a slow-down, 35 miles an hour, you know. And, you know, I got a few tickets going through East Las Vegas because you know, I, it was...they just slowed you down to go through East Las Vegas. It had some, some businesses, you know, small businesses. Boulder Highway had a few small businesses, but basically downtown Henderson was the business district for Henderson.

Interviewer: Do you remember any of the businesses' names?

Gary: On Boulder Highway?

Interviewer: On Boulder Highway.

Gary: Uh...

Interviewer: Anything stand out?

Gary: No, 'cuz we didn't have any McDonalds then. We didn't have any...I can't think of any. I can't think of any businesses on...there were businesses but they were, you know, real little mom-and-pop-y kind of places, you know. And of course, Pittman, which was part of Henderson, they had some trailer parks and stuff like that along the way. And, you know, there just wasn't a whole lot going on. Most all the activity was in downtown Henderson on Water Street and just maybe a half a block off of Water Street.

Interviewer: So as a teenager in downtown Henderson, what did you do for fun?

Gary: Well, actually, because I was going to Las Vegas High School I more or less hung around with people that I knew in Las Vegas type of thing and not only that, the Las Vegas kids in high school, they said those kids out there in Henderson are mean and tough 'cuz their folks work for the plants. You know...

Interviewer: What an interesting perception.

Gary: Yeah, so I mean, we didn't go venturing into Henderson much. I did when I went home, but that was it. I didn't know...I don't even know if I knew any of the kids out here, you know, in Henderson. But, oh yeah, they had a reputation of being sort of a rough bunch.

Interviewer: Hmm. That's funny. I hadn't heard that before.

Gary: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: So, so you didn't spend time at the youth center or Victory Theatre or anything like that? You really were...

Gary: I went to the Victory Theatre a couple of times, the youth center to the swimming pool there a couple of times. That was pretty much it. Yeah, that was, that was about the extent of our exposure.

Interviewer: So what did you do with your friends in Las Vegas then?

Gary: Oh, just hung around and went to beer busts and stuff like that and I was really amazed that they sold tickets to a beer bust. I thought that was so innovative. When I was going to school and bought tickets to the beer bust, and they had it out at Red Rock Canyon area, you know, so you drove out on a dirt road and stuff like that and they had a fire and they had some kegs out there. It was interesting, you know. I thought that was so novel. I mean, how entrepreneurial can that be?

Interviewer: Who sponsored that?

Gary: Just some of the kids in school, you know. One of the classes or something would have a beer bust, you know, out there in Red Rock Canyon.

Interviewer: I can't imagine that happening today.

Gary: No, no. As a matter of fact, the thing out there was, they always had the, and you always, you were out far enough where you could see cars coming up the road, and, so you could kinda see if the police were trying to sneak up on you, you know. It was pretty interesting.

Interviewer: It is. Did you spend any time out at Lake Mead or in that area?

Gary: Some, yes. Uh-huh, spent, you know, all the kids from everywhere went out to Lake Mead, you know, kinda hung around out there and played in the water, jumped off the cliffs and all that stuff like that, you know. And of course it was pretty, I mean, it was pretty open. I mean, they had, I'm sure they had, you know, rangers and stuff like that but you pretty much were on your own. I mean, you really were.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: They didn't fuss with you.

Interviewer: What did you...after having been in Henderson for a little while as a teenager, did you still sort of have that thought like, what is there to do out here because it's so isolated, or had you sort of become good enough friends with your friends in Las Vegas that you just, that you didn't even think about it?

Gary: I pretty much hung out in Las Vegas. As a matter of fact, when I was...I was the head of the Merchants Bureau for the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce – we're jumping a few years ahead – and I was asked to, if I wanted to take the job as the Director of the Henderson Chamber of Commerce. Well, I didn't know much about the politics in Henderson, and, but I knew a lot about Las Vegas, and so I didn't...I said, no, I don't think so, you know. Well, I'll back up, the story starts when, the governor at that time was Michael O'Callaghan, and I was also, when I was with the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce, I was also the Director of the State Chamber of Commerce, which was more or less of, we, kids would write for information on Nevada, and we'd send 'em stuff and things like that. And then as a result of that the Director of the State Department of Economic Development left the job, and I was asked if I would be interested in the job. But I would have had to move to Carson City, you know, and it was one of those jobs where you served at the pleasure of the governor and when the governor went, he got a new, the new guy got a new guy. So I thought, no, I didn't want to do that. So I passed up on that and then the gentleman who was head of the North Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce took the job. So then North Las Vegas asked me if I'd be interested, and I said no. And then the lady who was head of the Henderson Chamber of Commerce went to North Las Vegas. It was like musical chairs. Went to North Las Vegas and Henderson asked me, you know, I said no. And the gentleman who was the manager of BMI at the time – his name was Glenn Taylor – and he was also on the State, Director, Board for the State Chamber, so he was a pretty curse kind of guy, you know. He called me up. Oh, I was approached and I said no, thank you, but I'm not interested, so he was also on the Board of Directors of the Henderson Chamber of Commerce, and he called up and said, hey, I understand you turned down an interview to come out and talk to us about the Chamber job. I said, yeah, I said, I'm not interested, you know. And he said, well, now, I won't use the language he used, but he said, now how can you say that? You never even came out and talked to us so you have no idea what this job... I said, well, Glenn, I'm not interested. He said, well, you should come out and talk to us. Because he was my boss on another...I said, all right, I'll come out and talk to you, but I was not coming. That was absolutely sure I wasn't coming. So I thought, well knowing Glenn I better get some ammunition as to why, you know, so I attended a couple of council meetings and planning commission meetings and stuff, and I was like, wow, you know, life was real basic and pretty simple. But they had, for some reason I got caught up in it, they had a lot of heart. They didn't have plans of what they wanted to do, but you know they were all together and everybody was, you know, trying to row the boat together. And so I thought, well, gee, this is kinda, you know, kinda neat. While Las Vegas City was political, nothing like it is now, but it was political, you know, who knows who and the big names like the Cashmans and you know and those guys. And so, anyway, so I thought well that's kinda interesting. So anyway, they talked to me and made me an offer and I made them a counter-offer and they said OK so I wound up coming out and changing the job. Boy, people in Las Vegas thought I was goofy nuts. You know, I lived out here, but I didn't, you know, I didn't know much about you know the feeling about the community. But they said, you're actually gonna go out there as the Director of the Chamber of Commerce? And I said, yeah. And they said, oh my gosh, what in the heck is the matter with, you know, it's just a little old factory deal out there? I said, yeah, I know, but it has a nice feeling about it. They just couldn't understand it. Well, it was good timing because I came out here and we had a little office on Water Street, and it's where the expansion of the El Dorado is because the Boyd's owned the El Dorado – that was their very first property in Henderson, you know, Sam Boyd – and they owned the building next door. And so we were renting from them and so then when they decided to expand

the El Dorado we had to find new quarters, so we went and moved into the old school of St. Peter's Church. So we were there for, I don't know, a year and a half, something like that. We worked out a deal with St. Rose Hospital. We took the corner, Lake Mead and Boulder Highway and built that little white building that's there. And we had a 25-year lease on the ground, and so we built that, paid it off, and then, of course, the lease ran out. And so then we bought the building that they're in now on Major and Boulder Highway, which was a First Interstate Bank building, and when Bank of Nevada and First Interstate merged – they had the one downtown on Water Street, which is Wells Fargo now – they didn't need two banks that close, so they sold it to us for I think it was \$80,000. And a couple of, couple of entrepreneurs in the Chamber of Commerce put up the money and let us pay them off, and we renovated the inside and it's paid for. It's been a great building.

Interviewer: So what year was that that you joined the Henderson Chamber of Commerce?

Gary: '72.

Interviewer: '72. OK, so let's go back and fill in a few gaps just for sequencing. So you graduated from Las Vegas High School in...

Gary: '63.

Interviewer: '63 and then did you, did you stay in Henderson? I mean, you never lived in Las Vegas?

Gary: I lived in Las Vegas. Yes, when I got married, moved into Las Vegas.

Interviewer: OK, and what year was that?

Gary: That must have been, let's see...I don't pay a lot of attention to dates.

Interviewer: Just roughly.

Gary: It was roughly in the late '70s, mid-70s.

Interviewer: Mid-70s. So after, you moved to Las Vegas after you'd taken the position with the Henderson...?

Gary: No, I'm sorry, it was before then. It would had to be in the late '60s.

Interviewer: Late '60s.

Gary: It had to be late '60s 'cuz, no, I took that after, moved to Henderson. I took the Chamber of Commerce.

Interviewer: OK. So you were in Henderson, graduated, got married, moved to Las Vegas, and then worked with the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce for a while.

Gary: Actually I worked when I was going to high school. I worked for...it's now the Rebel stations, and it was, they had 5 stations, and it was owned by two gentlemen. And they also were the jobbers for Phillips Petroleum that had a couple of stations in Las Vegas and were building more. And I worked while I was going to school. I worked nights, graveyard at one of the stations. It was on Main and Charleston. And so I

worked there and then after I got divorced then they asked me if I would be interested to take over Phillips Petroleum. It had just gotten the contract for the atomic test site, for the petroleum products up there. So they asked me if I'd be interested in going up there. I said sure, you know, so I went up and had that for a couple of years and then they offered me a job. They said, look, we have these Econo stations and Jet-Away, they had 2 or 3 different names, but they were all under the, one company. And they said, we're losing money. We're losing money on these things because all the effort and interest is, was in the Phillips petroleum side. It's a branded product. And so they said, we're either gonna sell 'em or turn 'em around, you know, and if you want to try to turn 'em around, you know, we'll offer you the job. I thought, well, that's, sure, I'd like to try that and not only that I don't have to drive 6 days a week to the test site every day.

Interviewer: Right.

Gary: So I took the job and was able to turn 'em around. Took me a couple of years, but turned 'em around and then acquired another station. And then from there I went to the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce 'cuz I was in the Las Vegas Jaycees at that time – Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce as the manager of their Merchants Bureau. And then from there I went to Henderson.

Interviewer: OK, OK, I see. So when you moved back to Henderson where did you live?

Gary: Bought the house from my grandmother.

Interviewer: Oh, OK. And where did she go? Did she stay?

Gary: Yeah, she went, she didn't want the house anymore and she went and was renting an apartment on the Desert Inn Golf Course. And she was there for quite a while.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: Yeah.

Interviewer: Wow, that's great, so you bought your grandparents' house, and is that where you still live?

Gary: No.

Interviewer: No, OK.

Gary: I've, I went from there to Arrowhead Trail and bought a house there, so bought a house there, and from there went to Blackmoor, which is in the older area, it's not in the townsite area, but it's in the next, it's off of Major Avenue, bought there, remodeled the house. It was actually owned by Chet Sewell, who was the school...C.T. Sewell was named after him. He was the first superintendent of the Henderson School District. Bought that, and remodeled that. Bought the house next door, remodeled that. Bought the one across the street, didn't have to remodel that because it was pretty...And then, that's, so I'm still at the Blackmoor house.

Interviewer: Wow, ok. Over the years, how have you seen Henderson change? I mean, I know you spent a lot of time in Las Vegas as a teenager, but then you went to Las Vegas and came back. But how do you think the town has changed in the years that you've been here?

Gary: Quite a bit. As a matter of fact, the first thing, I mean, when I was with the Chamber of Commerce, we, we, we did things, the feel-good things that Chambers of Commerce usually do when the towns are little, you know, Christmas parades, Industrial Days, and you know, that kind of thing, beauty contests and you know talent contests and that sort of thing. And you know it's a rah-rah kind of a deal. The City was real poor at that time, the City government. In fact, they were buying their vehicles from the Atomic Test Site, the rejects. We had different colored vehicles, they were all...

Interviewer: And this was in the '70s.

Gary: Yeah, it was in the '70s, yeah. And so, anyway, from there, the town, you know we, we, kinda just, we were waiting for somebody, we just assumed that someone would come along, take us by the hand, and say, gonna show you guys how to make it as a city, you know. Well, we began to realize that that isn't going to happen, that the only hand we're gonna get's the one that's at the end of our arm, you know. And so we kinda said, ok, well what do we need to do to start developing ourselves as a marketable city? Well, the two basic things you need is adequate sewer and water. If you don't have that, you can't grow. So we put together a program with the City to float bonds, sewer and water bonds. And the water bonds weren't too...sewer bonds were really the thing. We needed more capacity, sewage capacity. And so we put together a sewer and water bond package and promoted it. In the meantime, Green Valley had started developing, you know, and they are, all of their infrastructure's all bonded too, you know. And so anyway, they were developing. So we said, hey, if we're gonna grow up to be a city of any size, we need adequate sewer, water, and this 'n' that 'n' the other thing. So we were buying, I think all of our water was coming from BMI at that time. We weren't on the Southern Nevada water thing. And so anyway, the sewer bonds, by god, we got 'em, and sewer bonds are about as unsexy to sell as anything because, I mean, the people you're asking to indebt their property, they already have sewer. I mean, you know, it's not like, oh yeah, I need sewers, you know, they've already got it. So you're, you're asking them to buy future, futures for the City. And by god, we sold 'em. We said, wow, look at there. You know, we're pretty proud of ourselves for doing that. So then we began to start incrementally advancing, you know, and of course Green Valley was really, really starting to get its own weather over there. And on this side of town we were like, not doing too much until we kind of said...I was going down Boulder Highway and I stopped at the Skyline and one of the owners, John Kish, owned the Skyline. He's passed away now. And so he's one of these cash 'n' carry, he owned everything, you know. In fact, I was there and his dad was there one time, and he said, "John, you gotta borrow some money." John said, "Why?" He said, "Because, you know, if you're gonna, you just gotta borrow money, you know, you're a businessman." You know, John said, "No, I don't think so." So anyway, I was going, I stopped by John's, and he said, you know, he said, "I am so tired of bringing people to my establishment" – business people – "and it's taking 'em up Boulder Highway. Looks terrible," and it did. I mean, it was this wide. Nobody, we never could figure out why they took so much of a swath for Boulder, for the right-of-ways of Boulder Highway, and it started at about...it started probably at Sunset, it got this wide. It was this wide going to Las Vegas, this wide from Sunset all the way up to Horizon and then it went back down to this. And we, you know, and it was a deed that was given to the, to the federal government from the Bureau of Land Management. Couldn't find out why that was so wide, I mean, you know, but anyway, so said, boy, this is really terrible because, you know, and I said, I know because when I'm taking people around showing them potential sites for businesses, stuff like that, I said, you know, you gotta drive 'em up Boulder Highway, you know, it's like...You know, and so, anyway, we had just, prior to that, we wanted to...Clark County, Las Vegas were putting together a, what they called an advanced wastewater treatment facility down in Las Vegas, and they wanted Henderson to become part of that. Well, we realized that, you know, if, if you control your sewer and water you control your destiny, but if somebody else is controlling your sewer or water, and they're bigger than you, you know, they got your, you know, by the arm. So we said, no, we didn't want to be part of that. Well, they fought like crazy and so we put an application in to build what they called rapid infiltration basins in Henderson that would treat the water

and then put it in the Las Vegas wash. And so, a gentleman by the name of Bob Broadbent, he was, he was at that time was the Undersecretary of the Department of the Interior, and so we knew Bob and this and that and the other thing, and he was back there, and we had put an application in with EPA for these rapid infiltration basins. And we had about a week, and if they didn't get signed, whatever didn't get signed in a week, there was other applications, we didn't get it. So then we were gonna be lumped into the advanced wastewater treatment facility. And so, I think URS Engineering was the company that we had hired to do a study for us on the advanced wastewater. So they were at a cocktail party in DC, and they overheard a conversation between Bob Broadbent and the EPA Director, can't remember...And the EPA Director said, well, what do you think, we got this thing from Henderson, and they wanna, you know, what do you think? He said, well, I think they ought to be part of the AWT. So they call up on the phone, and they call me and said, we got a problem. Bob Broadbent told, you know, so I said, oh, my gosh. We were in between city managers at the time, so I called Bob. I said, Bob, I understand you know, that you've told them that...he said, well, yeah. I said, well now, Bob, we don't wanna be part of the AWT. I mean, you know, this and that and I was like...and he said, ok, ok. He said, I'll take care of it, I'll take care of it. I said, OK. He said, 'cuz I don't wanna come home and everybody be mad at me. So anyway, they did take care of it. We got the grant. We built our rapid infiltration basin, which gave us the opportunity to develop re-use water, which the whole Boulder Highway project's done with that. And that was how we got the water to irrigate Boulder Highway, Palm Mortuary, and the golf, Black Mountain Golf Course, you know, was off of the water, the treated water. And so that's, and so anyway, I know I got a little bit off the side, but so anyway, we just got the OK and we were gonna develop the treated water. So I was sittin' in there talking to John Kish, and I said, well, why don't we...? I said, we're gonna get this treated water, I said, we can, you know, irrigate this Boulder Highway maybe. So we go up and we talk to, it was the president of the Chamber of Commerce at the time, his name was Ben Stepman. He had Henderson Motors, which is the Hyundai dealer, he had that. So we sat down and said, you know, here's the deal with the...he said, that's great. We ought to do that, so then we go up the street to Father Caviglia at St. Peter's, and we sit down with him, and he said, great, so we put together a little thing. And we go to the City says, great idea, we have no money, so don't even count on us for any money 'cuz we can't put anything into this. So we said, well, we'll float a bond issue. They said OK. So we put together a bond issue and we put it out there and it failed the first time. And it wasn't because, we were real worried about Green Valley because what do they care about Boulder Highway, you know, I mean...? So they didn't, we didn't think they would go for it, but by god, they did pretty good. I mean, the thing that lost was those homes that had frontage on the frontage road that goes up and down Boulder Highway. They were afraid that it was going to be an assessment to them, and it wasn't, you know. So anyway six months later we re-grouped, did the, you know, PR work and said, no, it's not gonna, you know, and got it passed. So we got the bond, it was \$5 million, I believe it was, to do the project along Boulder Highway. So anyway that began to cause things to kinda look different. You know, of course a lot of people said, oh, my god, what are you trying to...what do you want to beautify Boulder Highway for? I said, well, because it's kinda like a major strip that goes through there, you know. And while we were doin' that, there was a...the state was talking about...you know, we were also very much involved in the, getting the freeway through Henderson or to Henderson anyway. And there was a lot of, a lot of struggling on that because two things: some people wanted it to go right up Boulder Highway. You know, just right up Boulder Highway. We said, well, that's fine except when we started really looking at it they would have had to shut off the businesses on both sides. There was no other way to get out of Henderson other than Boulder Highway, and that would be under major construction. I mean, talk about a nightmare. So, we said, well, ok, Green Valley's developing and if we can put it over here where we got Boulder Highway here, we got the freeway here, and we got I-15 over here, you know, that'd be the best thing to do. So we worked that and worked that and lobbied the state and did all of the right things and Las Vegas was not happy with us because they wanted to take 95 and go through Las Vegas more, you know, and that's what they were doing. So they were puttin' all their ammunition in that, but we were fortunate. We got it on and got the designation for Henderson's thing and then once we got it to Henderson then we got Boulder City really involved and said, you guys need to

really get on the point on this thing because you need it to go to Boulder City. You know, we can fight it and justify why it should come to Henderson, but you know, to go to Boulder City, it's not our, not our dog in the fight. We can't really say, well, you know, you need to go to Boulder City. They'd say, well, why? You got it, you know, it's all you need. So Boulder City jumped in, and got it all the way through with the Bruce Woodburys and everybody that you know got involved on this thing. It really turned out pretty, pretty good. We also got the funds for the community college, same way, leverage, you know, with the right people, you know, and we were able to get for the, up there off of College, you know. That was City land, and we got the, all the infrastructure. The City brought the infrastructure in. The City couldn't give the property to the university system for the college, and of course, that was another thing. Las Vegas didn't want it out there because they were working on West Charleston's thing and this and that and the other thing. And so anyway, the way we worked around that is we, we got the City to say, OK, we'll bring all the infrastructure in, the water and sewer and stuff like that, and, but the University has to buy the dirt. You know, so they bought the dirt, infrastructure came in, put the college up, and then of course some of it they peeled off for the high school now, you know, stuff like that. It was all, it was all a game of leverage and compromise, just about everything. We learned a lot because we were pretty naïve. In fact, we were really naïve. We were pretty dumb, but we began to realize, you know, that things just don't happen because it's the right thing to go around, you know. You have to fight for it 'cuz other people are trying to pull things in another direction. And so we did. That's how we got those two projects going.

Interviewer: Who were some of the people who were instrumental in helping, that you worked with, that were instrumental in helping with those things?

Gary: In the Chamber? Well, in the Boulder Highway project and the community college was Father Caviglia, Betty Scott...she was, they were...the church was letting them use the classrooms for community college classes, you know, and she was the one who headed that up. And Ben Stepman and there was just a lot of people. I mean, you know, there were...the City kinda got into it, too, you know, with us. The same thing with the convention center. We, we thought we should have a convention center out here or something like that. And the City said, we have no money, don't come to us. And we said, that's OK. So we...Bob Broadbent was County Commissioner, and he was on the Fair and Recreation Board. And the Cashman Field complex was applying for funds to build that through the Convention, Fair, and Recreation Board. And so, we jumped in and said, well, we need some funds too to build the convention center out there in Henderson. And so we had to wrangle on that and he got funds for Boulder City to build a swimming pool. North Las Vegas built a water park, which I don't even think is there anymore. And we got a million dollars to do the convention center. You know, the City had the property and that's where the old high school gym used to be, right there in that area. And so we got the money for that, but then we didn't, the City said we have no money to furnish it, no money and this and that. So at the time, the racetrack, the dog track, was coming online, the Funk family. And so, talked them into a donation, put chairs and PA system and all that stuff like that. And so, we had to go out and also, all the, we needed operating funds and so we went and talked to the motels, we didn't have any hotels out here, talked to the motels, all those little places that had gaming, you know, slot machines, to allow us, or to support us putting a tax on their gaming stuff, you know, which would go to operate the convention center. Well, who knew how big that would get? I mean to tell you, you know, Sunset Stations and all of this, they were rolling in money. They had more money than they could do anything with, so then...And it was an enterprise fund, so the City couldn't take that money, you know. And the City wanted it as an enterprise fund so it couldn't be co-mingled with the City budget, was a stand-alone. And so, which was, really turned out to be great because then the City started being able to get some of the money by the services they provided to the enterprise funds, you know. And so, convention center's there. It's been expanded and the whole thing. But it was another Chamber, you know all of that stuff was Chamber of Commerce getting all excited and getting in the thing, you know.

Interviewer: How long did you work with the Chamber of Commerce?

Gary: 23 years.

Interviewer: 23 years. That's a long time.

Gary: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: So around what year was it when you finally...did you retire or...?

Gary: I left the Chamber of Commerce and went to work for McCarran Airport.

Interviewer: Oh.

Gary: And things were going really good, you know. And I just was ready to try flyin' my kite in a new wind, I guess, you know. And you know people said, well, why? Everything's going good, the City's going good...I said, well, yeah, you know...and at that time Henderson Sky Harbor Airport, the City was thinking about... Well, actually, the Department of Aviation, Bob Broadbent was running the Department of Aviation. He keeps coming into my life.

Interviewer: I've noticed.

Gary: Anyway, he was running the Department of Aviation when he came back from DC, and they were kinda looking at, they took North Las Vegas, and they wanted Henderson. What they were doing was acquiring these smaller satellite places so that they could get the smaller planes off McCarran, you know. Because, which I didn't know, but you can't get as many planes in and off of the field when you got these little guys in there because they have to be back quite a bit because they get jet wash, you know, and turbulence, and they can't be...the guy, another jet behind him has to be far enough out because they're comin' in quicker than they're going, you know. So anyway, long story short, the City of Henderson thought maybe they wanted to be in the airport business. And the Alper family, Arby Alper had left and Eliot and his mother, which was Arby's ex-wife, they had the airport. They owned the airport, but they didn't want to operate the airport, you know. It was his passion. He actually lent money to the City of Henderson to buy the Green Valley property under the exchange that he would be able to get this property for, to build an airport. You know, where it was, and he researched the area and said, that's the best place when this and that and the other thing. And he used to work for Grumman, so he was kind of an engineering kinda guy. It was the worst stuff, I mean, it had boulders and everything out there. Big boulders, big as this room. But anyway, that's another story, but anyway, so the City gave him the OK and property, and he built the airport. And so while we were looking around we, I forgot where I was going with this and I got off on a side trip. What was the question? What was the question again?

Interviewer: Well, we were talking about what you did after you left the Chamber.

Gary: Oh, after I left the Chamber...so anyway, we got the City to sit down and say, you know, as long as it's a private airport the FAA doesn't require upgrades like they do if it's a public airport. If the City buys it, it becomes a public airport and that means they're gonna have to put a half a million dollars a year into the airport. The City said, well shoot, we can't afford that. So that let them, the Chamber called a meeting and that let them say, no, Clark County, Clark County wasn't going to step in unless the City said, we don't want it. So

the County came in and bought the airport. You know, bought the property or was negotiating the property, and so that's when I was asked if I'd be interested in in maybe being the director of the airport.

Interviewer: Oh.

Gary: So I said, yeah, that would be good. So then I went to work for the airport, and while they were negotiating, I managed the advertising inside the building, you know, all of those big signs. I also managed their commercial property outside the fence. This is area that there were homes and stuff where the noise was...and the FAA said you gotta...so they'd give the money to the airport. They'd buy that stuff up. See, then we'd turn it into commercial.

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Gary: So anyway, that was my...so anyway I liked that. I really liked doing that, and because I was involved in bringing Levi here and Berry Plastics and all of those things, you know. You know, I was used to working with some of the bigger companies, you know, and stuff – Gold Bond Ice Cream. There's a lot of stories out there, I'm telling you. So anyway, I said, yeah, OK, so I went to work and I really liked it. So I went to Mr. Broadbent and I said, I know the deal was that I was gonna go out and run the airport, I said, but I really like, you know, doing the commercial property stuff and the advertising, so I said, would it be a problem if I stayed on that side and you got yourself... He said, oh no, he said, they're lined up. He said, I could get a bunch of staff people from the airport out here, who would love to go out there and run that thing. You know, so that's how I got connected with the airport.

[break in recording]

Gary: ...You know, Ocean Spray, Levi...

Interviewer: What was your role in bringing in companies like Ocean Spray and...?

Gary: We worked on, they come to a community or an area to check you out, and you're on a short list. Sometimes you're on a long list, but you're on a list. And they come and they, you know, I mean it's like a movin' into a neighborhood. It's like, do I like the neighborhood, the schools, the churches, the parks and so on, you know? So they would come in at some time, holding us up to the light, finding out, talking to people, going and getting their haircut done and talking to the barber and see what he thinks about the community. You know, the things like that. So they'd give you the, you know, from the grass roots look-see. And then, then they go back and they huddle and compare notes and say, yep, here's, this is the one we're gonna go to. You know, so that works out.

Interviewer: Interesting...

Gary: Our biggest, first one was Levi. That was a big one.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: I mean, it was a national name.

Interviewer: Right.

Gary: Big deal.

Interviewer: Right, so how long did you work in that commercial, advertising capacity?

Gary: At McCarran?

Interviewer: McCarran, yeah.

Gary: Um, five years.

Interviewer: OK, and then did you move on to something else after that or did you...?

Gary: Yeah, I went to, I went to the monorail when they were starting that up.

Interviewer: Oh, OK.

Gary: Yeah, and so I was there eight years.

Interviewer: OK.

Gary: And, you know, helping getting that off the ground. I managed contracts and special projects and things. And that's another Bob Broadbent thing. He went over there, he left the airport and went over there because the MGM and Bally's thought the monorail...they had a monorail running between the two properties, freebie, and the trains were moth-balled from Disney, and they were doing about five million passengers a year, free. So they thought, so they said, well, shoot, if you connect all the Strip properties, that'd be great, you know. The problem is they wanted to go down the Strip, which was really where it probably should have gone. But a lot of the properties on the Strip said, no, no, no, we don't want any you know things in the air. We got these beautiful signs and water treatments and stuff. We don't want anything obstructing people seeing what we got, you know, they spent millions. Steve Wynn was one of them, you know. And so it wound up going on the east side, back end of the east side hotels and properties, which never, doesn't work because you gotta walk a mile through the hotels to get to the doggone thing, and they're not real excited about showing people how to get out of their property. They like people coming in, you know, so they don't sign it real, real good, you know, and it's always a struggle to try to get them to sign the thing darn really good. They just, you know, were, were very selfish, which is normal.

Interviewer: Right.

Gary: So anyway, they built the monorail, but it never, it never could get, you know, get legs under it. And it's in semi-receivership. And I could see the handwriting, you know, on the wall after it was up and going for a year or so. You know, I don't know, I don't know how we're gonna get people to do that. The conventions did well because people would stay at those properties and take the monorail to the Convention Center, but you know, that isn't enough. Wasn't enough. And so, and eventually it was supposed to go to the airport, and it was gonna go downtown. That was the plans, but... Going downtown was the first thought, but the cost, to take it from Sahara Avenue down to Fremont Street, there's a lot of nothing in between there to offset the cost of construction. You know, you gotta have a reason for people to take these things, and downtown just wasn't a big enough magnet...

Interviewer: Right.

Gary: ...to do it, so we said, no. So we talked about going to the airport, and in the meantime, we were not really, we were having a tough time just trying to keep, trying to keep the thing going and that sort of thing. So we couldn't get anyone to buy, or wanna buy the bonds to extend it to the airport because it wasn't doing good this way. And there was a lot of concerns about what do we go to the airport, OK, let's say you get off the plane. You got your luggage and this and that and the other thing, do you wanna haul your luggage to the monorail? Wouldn't you rather just go out and grab a cab? You know, that kind of a thing, and it's a, it was a good argument, you know. I mean, it just was.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: So there just was no passion to really break your pick on that.

Interviewer: So it sounds like, I mean, you've been living in Henderson for the most part, but you've had your, you've been working all over the Valley.

Gary: Yes.

Interviewer: Las Vegas, Henderson, back and forth.

Gary: Yes.

Interviewer: So, OK, let's return to Henderson for just a second.

Gary: Sure.

Interviewer: I think Ed had some questions about small business in Henderson.

Gary: OK.

Interviewer: So let me give him the mic.

Ed: Well, I was just hoping you could talk a little bit, when you first started at the Chamber, you got involved with the small businesses and the City people, and that whole kind of group of people, kind of, what was the atmosphere like? What was it like to work with the people and accomplish what you were trying to do and build the city and stuff like that?

Gary: It was pretty good. I mean, most all of the businesses were either on the small section of Boulder Highway between Sunset and let's say, Water Street or just up to Horizon, and that, you know it was sparsely, it was sparse in there, and then the rest of them were in downtown Henderson, you know, type of thing. I mean, we even had a, a department store, you know, downtown. It was called Vegas Village. There was one in town, there was one downtown and that sort of thing.

Interviewer: Can you, I, I've read a little bit about Vegas Village, but I don't know very much about it. Can you tell me a little bit more about what it was?

Gary: Yes, Vegas Village as I recall, you know where JB's is, or whatever it is, on Water Street, the casino there? Just on the Lake Mead side of Water Street, I mean of Pacific?

Interviewer: OK.

Gary: You know, there's a gas station.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Gary: That building that's right next to it.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Gary: As I recall that was, that was, it may not have been, it may... I don't know why, but it seems like that was where it was, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah, so it was a department store.

Gary: Yeah.

Interviewer: OK.

Gary: We had Penney's and Sears and, you know, the little town things where you mostly ordered stuff out of catalogs.

Interviewer: Right, were those on Water Street as well, or were those on Boulder Highway?

Gary: No, they were on Water Street.

Interviewer: Water Street, OK. Alright. And so that was in the late '60s or early '70s at that point?

Gary: Mm-hmm. Early '70s, yeah.

Interviewer: OK. And when did the development on Boulder Highway really start to happen, just for timeframe?

Gary: The development on Boulder Highway started to happen with the water treatment...

Interviewer: Right, and that was when approximately?

Gary: That was eighty... Can't remember now. Like I told you, I'm not really good at... But it's around eighty, the mid- to late-'80s.

Interviewer: OK. Mid to late '80s?

Gary: Yeah.

Interviewer: Right, yeah, about the same time that Green Valley was starting to get going.

Gary: Yeah.

Interviewer: OK, did you have anything else, Ed?

Gary: Oh, you wanted to talk about small businesses. Well, that's where they were. They were all downtown. You had Van Valey's Shoes and Perry's Men's Store and Vernay's women's store. She was over in the shopping center that's where... you know where the Chamber building is on the corner, well that used to be Safeway over there. There was a Safeway store.

Interviewer: Right.

Gary: That was the anchor. And so she was over there. And the Radio Shack, which was... she's on the school board now... I can't think of her name, but she's on the school board, and her family, their family owned Radio Shack.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Gary: And so there was a lot of little places – barbershops and things like that, but everybody worked pretty close together. I mean, we were, I mean, that's all we had was each other. You know, and putting on events to kind of create more lift, you know, community pride and spirit and so on and so forth. And the BMI plants, I mean, they used to, when we had like Industrial Days parades they used to spend thousands of dollars on floats. You know, like the Rose Bowl-type stuff?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, I've seen a few pictures.

Gary: Yeah, they put some real money in there. But, you know, after a while, they got more corporate spread and it was like, spend that kind of money on a float in Henderson, Nevada? You know, I mean, it was a pretty big, it was a pretty big deal at that time. And so that's kinda how that all came about. And of course they, they moved their plant managers around too, so they don't, which is pretty typical. Large companies don't like their people to be too long in one spot because they get too connected, you know, and with not only the community, but with their employees. And they don't like that, you know. They wanna move you around, get a new guy in there, you know, new sheriff in town and kinda shake things up a little bit, keep everybody on their toes.

Interviewer: Was, what was the small business atmosphere like in terms of, was it difficult for small businesses to stay in Henderson?

Gary: No, because it was so far to go to Las Vegas. And the only places there were to shop in Las Vegas was on Fremont Street.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: You know.

Interviewer: So that wasn't a usual trip for most people.

Gary: Yeah, I mean, it wasn't a hard trip...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: It was like, you know, shoe store in Henderson. I'd rather go down there, you know, where everybody knows their name, like Cheers, type of thing. But yeah, and then the first mall they built in Las Vegas was on Charleston, Charleston Plaza Mall, you know. And that, that kinda started pulling away from downtown.

Interviewer: Right, still not really close...

Gary: How long have you been here?

Interviewer: I've only been here for a couple of years.

Gary: Oh!

Interviewer: But I've been...

Gary: What a project...

Interviewer: I've been working with a lot of historical materials so I've had a chance to, I mean, I've been through every single issue of the Henderson Home News, for example.

Gary: Sure.

Interviewer: So I've picked up on some of the larger events, but there are lots of details that I just don't know.

Gary: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Because I haven't been here.

Gary: Yep. The Henderson Home News, yeah, trying to think of who had that. Anyway, he was kind of a, maverick kinda guy. Threw his weight around, through his newspaper.

Interviewer: Oh, are you talking about Morry Zenoff?

Gary: Morry, yeah. Morry.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, I've wondered about him because he published that paper for a long time.

Gary: He did. Yeah, he did. They were publishing, when I came, they were, you know where Wal-Mart is there on Lake Mead?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Gary: Well that used to be Victory Village, it was either Carver Park or Victory Village, one or the other...

Interviewer: Right.

Gary: And they had a place in there, you know. And then they moved up on Water Street there.

Interviewer: Yeah, did you, now did you know Morry?

Gary: Yes.

Interviewer: What was he like as a person?

Gary: He was, Morry was a, kind of a, crusty old... you know, I mean, he enjoyed the fact that he was the newspaper guy.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: You know, and you don't want Morry saying anything bad about you. So you behaved yourself. You know, or you should behave yourself. You know, he'd take people to task in his column and this and that and the other thing, you know. I can't remember... I don't believe that we ever, I don't think he ever took me to task in his column. But now Mike O'Callaghan, when he took the paper over, he took me to task. What the heck was it? It had to do with one of the beauty pageants. And we disqualified a girl because we were very strict. The applications had to be in, you had to make all the rehearsals, no if, ands, or buts about it, and parents had to sign. This was, people would think this was a Miss America deal. I mean, it was so competitive. Parents had to sign that this was their age and when they were, you know, birth dates and that sort of thing. Well one of the gals was not, she was younger. She won! She was younger. I think it was six... I think the age was like 16 to 18, something, and she was like 15. And she won. Pretty girl. And so she was crowned and this and that and the other thing. Well then the kids in school start saying, yeah, well, she's not even, she's, you know. So then the rumors get out and everything, so then we've got to check them out. And we found out that, yeah, she was... The parent, the mother falsified the deal, and she was supposed to go on TV-5. And she was down there, and one of the gals I gave you, named Klyda, she was the assistant, my assistant, and she had to go down there and pull her off and go on in her place because we were de-throning. Oh, I'm telling you... So the next gal, the runner-up, this and that, and so Mike O'Callaghan took us to task for, you know, disqualifying the gal and everything. But, you know, I mean the rules were the rules.

Interviewer: Right.

Gary: And I'm pretty literal about rules. In fact, we had a mother one time that, her daughter didn't get the application in. They each had a business, they would get a business sponsor that would buy the suit and the dress and you know, and so the sponsor was, I can't remember the name of them, but anyway, didn't get in. So, doors shut, can't get in. Mother called, oh my gosh, you know, my daughter, it wasn't her fault. The sponsor didn't get it in and this and that and the other thing. And I said, well, that kinda how it is. And she said, well, I'm gonna have an injunction against the...

Interviewer: Oh, geez.

Gary: ...the beauty pageant and this and that and the other...you know, I'm gonna get a court deal. So I said to her, I said, well, look, you may or may not be able to pull that off, but I said, let's just suppose you do pull it off. I said, your daughter's gotta to go to school with all those other girls that have been in that thing, and if you shut that thing down, I said, do you want to be your daughter? Well, I just don't think it's right and this and that and the other thing, but she never did anything.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Gary: But she was on fire to...

Interviewer: Do something. Complain at least.

Gary: Oh yeah. Well, and it wasn't her fault. It was her sponsor's fault, and the sponsor called and said, it was my fault. Doesn't make any difference. It didn't happen. Whoever's fault it was, she picks the sponsor. The sponsor picks her. That's it, you know, I mean, what can we say? Oh gosh, we used to, we had open fistfights after the beauty pageant. Parents, they're all upset because their daughter didn't win, you know, and this and that and the other thing. We had to, we had to escort the judges who were just people we picked. One of the past queens and you know, TV personalities and stuff like that to kinda, and...they just, they were all over the sponsors, or I mean, the judges and we had to kinda escort them out of the building, you know, so they didn't get beat up by the, by the parents. And the parents said, well, they're not professionals. We said, well, either is your daughter. This is a, you know, an amateur beauty...and you know, they couldn't have had any modeling for money, you know, whether it was for their hands or feet or body or hair. I mean, this was really a big deal.

Interviewer: And this was the beauty pageant associated with Industrial Days, right?

Gary: Yes, it was.

Interviewer: So it was just one of the many activities that was happening during Industrial Days.

Gary: Yes, but I'll tell you what. We had to be so precise in the way we did all this stuff because, oh man, it was, it was a...it was a killer. Kept you at night, you know, trying to make sure that nobody did an end-run or figured out how to do an end-run, you know. But that one about taking a gal off TV, that was...

Interviewer: That's something, yeah.

Gary: Yeah. She was right down there with her best sash on and her thing on and gonna get ready to go on the show.

Interviewer: Did the beauty pageants continue or have they...?

Gary: Oh, they're not...we don't have them anymore.

Interviewer: Yeah, I didn't think so.

Gary: Henderson just got too big. And then when they changed it to, from Industrial Days to Heritage Days, and the reason was is because, you know, the rest of Henderson other than the old Henderson, industry was not their thing, you know?

Interviewer: Right, yeah.

Gary: So they were all part, and it was the, we couldn't get the Green Valley High School band to be in the parade because, you know, they don't want to be in an Industrial Days parade. So we had to change the

name to Heritage, and they still, a lot of the old-timers say, oh, it should have been Industrial Days. It's always been Industrial Days, that's how Henderson got started, and this and that and the other thing. That all happened after I was gone, so...

Interviewer: Oh, ok.

Gary: I didn't get caught up in that.

Interviewer: OK, yeah, Dianna had mentioned that when they changed the name from Industrial Days to Heritage Days that there were quite a few people who were just up in arms...

Gary: Oh, they were.

Interviewer: And they had T-shirts and rallying for the Industrial Days name. They did not want that changed.

Gary: Oh, I know. And we had strict rules on the parade. You couldn't throw things off of the floats because kids would all run out in the street. Big kids would push little kids and they could get under the wheels or whatever, this type of thing. And the lieutenant governor at one time, his name was Lonnie Hammargren. He's the one that has all that weird stuff at his house. I don't know if you've ever seen, I mean, he's got space capsules. I mean, collects stuff. It's gonna be like a museum, I think when he leaves. But he was, he's a neurosurgeon, very successful and very good. Well, he had a float in the parade, you know, and one of my jobs was riding my motorcycle around, make sure people weren't doing what they, you know, this and that and the other thing. And so he had, and you weren't supposed to adver, you know, if you were running for something you couldn't put "vote for" whoever it was. So, so I go, and here's Lonnie's float. It's got...along the side of the trailer: Vote for Lonnie Hammargren for Lieutenant Governor. Big letters. You know, so he wasn't there, but his driver was there. I said, you gotta get that off of there because, I said, you're not getting in the parade like that. This is when we were in the staging. Said, well, that's what Lonnie... I said, out. I want this gone. So anyway, I go back to check up. Well, all they did was take some electrical tape and put some lines through it like that.

Interviewer: Oh geez.

Gary: Like you couldn't read it. So there was Lonnie. I said, Lonnie, if that isn't off of there, you're out. He was Lieutenant Governor, too. I said, you're out, you know. He said, well you can't, it's covered. I said, it is not covered up, get out. So he took it out of there, you know. And so the next year he called and said, this is Lonnie. He said, now I'm not gonna put anything on the float. Now I want you to know, he said, I'm not gonna put any advertisements on the float. And everybody wanted to be at the front of the parade. That's another thing. Everybody wants to be at the front of the parade, you know. I was in the back last year, I want to be in the front this year. And you have to space those things. You have to have bands every, you know, find out how many bands you got, and then you got to spread 'em out.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: And you can't put horses in front of the band, you know. I mean, it's all, there's a lot to the whole doggone thing, you know.

Interviewer: A lot of logistics.

Gary: Oh.

Interviewer: People don't realize.

Gary: Yeah, really.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: There's a whole lot of stuff.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: And, you know, everybody wants to tell you what's wrong with stuff, than, you know, and... It's a big to-do, but that's the kind of stuff we did.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: And then after I left, of course, you know, the City got big enough they said, these things cost money. And they did. We used to sell badges that said "Industrial Days" and whatever the theme was, you know, to the businesses. Well, you know, I mean, it was a token deal, and you know, they weren't all excited about it, but they did it. And then we had the book.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. So Henderson changed in that way, too. When it started growing...

Gary: Oh, absolutely.

Interviewer: Then the sort of the, you had a core group of people who'd been here for a long time who were sort of holding on to the older traditions, but then you had a lot of newcomers and they just were not...

Gary: New people and they didn't relate to it, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: And not only that, you know, until they really did all that beautification along Lake Mead to cover up the plants...

Interviewer: Right.

Gary: I mean, there was nothing pretty or sexy about looking at those old, rusty buildings down there, you know. And at the time we had what was called the Henderson cloud, and it was white out here. You looked at it from Vegas, it was like, anybody live out there, you know? And what it was was ammonia and chlorine. When you put two bottles together, when they get up here and they form, they form a white thing. Oh my gosh, that thing was studied by the EPA, by everybody, because the Greenspun, Hank Greenspun, he had the Sun newspaper at the time, he wanted to shut those plants down so bad, you know. Of course, he had Green Valley going on down there, type of thing. And so, boy, he was raising holy heck about how... And so they started looking at kids in school. Was the attendance less in Henderson than it was in Las Vegas because you got this cloud out there? No, the attendance was better in Henderson than it was in, and the schools are

right around, you know, than it was in Las Vegas, so they don't like that. So then they started looking at birds and the wash, you know, because birds are kinda susceptible to stuff like that. And so they started studying the birds. And more, we had more kinds of different kinds of birds than anywhere else. So that didn't go over too good, you know. It was a visual thing.

Interviewer: Right.

Gary: And they flew helicopters through there and measured, oh my gosh, and it was, it was more of a nuisance.

Interviewer: How big of an area did it cover? I mean, did it cover...?

Gary: It covered the whole downtown Henderson.

Interviewer: Did it really?

Gary: And Pittman and the whole thing. And it was always where there was, it was in the winter, when there was an inversion, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Gary: And...would hold it down to the ground. But it was, it was chlorine, and I remember Mike, I can't remember his name, he was head of the health district, he came out and was talking at one of our Chamber meetings, and he said, yeah, yeah, well, one of these days the white cloud's gonna be gone, and Las Vegas is gonna have a problem. Even I went... that's never gonna happen. Well, he was right 'cuz as they learned how to capture the emissions through scrubbers and stuff like that, they neutralized it. No white cloud, you know, except if they had an episode where they had a leak or they were changing a valve or something, that type of thing. And sure enough, the yellow cloud in Las Vegas started getting bigger. You can stand out here and you can see the yellow cloud, you know, out there.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Like a haze.

Gary: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: And he said, that's carbon monoxide, ten times worse than what's out here, you know, but no one would believe it. People would, you living in Henderson? How do you guys live out in that cloud like that? You don't even notice it, you don't even see it. Oh, gotta be killing you.

Interviewer: Oh, that's funny.

Gary: It is, it really is.

Interviewer: So you've had a lot of interesting experiences out here. How has your family enjoyed living in Henderson?

Gary: They enjoyed it. I mean, it was, it was fine.

Interviewer: Did they ever feel like they wanted to leave? It was too hot? Or were there any, not enough to do?

Gary: No. No, not really. Well, my son lives in Arizona, but no, I mean, after a while, you know, it's like I was saying at the beginning, it's like, boy, I'm not sticking around here. You know, this place is... And not only that, there was nothing green. Everything was, I mean, there really wasn't. The trees were, some were kind of green, but most of the... In fact, when I lived on Carson Way, whenever they'd have a chlorine episode, you'd go outside and all the leaves fell off the tree.

Interviewer: Oh geez.

Gary: I mean, you know... And there was no, very little greenery out here. And so it was like, what do people wanna live out there for? And I was, you know that's why most all my activity was out in Las Vegas, you know. It was civilized, you know. Come out here to Henderson where there are a bunch of plant workers and stuff like that, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah. Sorry, go ahead.

Gary: No, and that's kinda how most people... And everybody, when you would do things with people that lived in Las Vegas, you'd say, well, you come on out here. Oh, I'll go all the way out there? But they always, like it was shorter for you to go in there, you know.

Interviewer: Right.

Gary: But to come all the way out to Henderson? Oh, I don't know.

Interviewer: So, but you've stayed and...

Gary: I stayed.

Interviewer: And why have you stayed?

Gary: Well, because you just kinda get tied into the whole thing, you know. I was gonna tell you something, but if I tell you, if you talk to Klyda, when she was my assistant...no throwing stuff from the, you know, during parades. And we had the Christmas parade and this and that and the other thing. Santa was on the fire truck and he was throwing candy off the fire truck and she was gonna throw Santa out of the parade.

Interviewer: The main attraction of the parade.

Gary: She went over and told Santa and said, you throw one more candy and you're out of the parade. Well, I heard about that.

Interviewer: That's great.

Gary: Which is the whole reason the parade is there anyway.

Interviewer: Yeah, right. Oh, that's funny.

Gary: I mean, I, every once in a while if I see her I kid her about it. Oh yeah, I said, you know, people don't know who they're messing with. She was gonna throw Santa out of the parade.

Interviewer: That's good. Well, let's see, I think that's sort of all I have in terms of questions. Ed, did you have anything else you wanted to add?

Ed: Nothing specific unless there was anything you want to discuss about, like your tenure as being president or the changes or any people that you met that had an impact on you?

Gary: Well, there was, you know, I mean, when I was with the Chamber, you know, we were still trying to prove ourselves valid, you know. And, of course, it was kind of interesting because you know we were like, politically, we were like, oh yeah, those guys out there in Henderson, you know, I mean, from the rest of the Valley, even the State for that matter. But as we began to politically get connected, you know, in the legislature and stuff like that, you know, the Jack Jeffreys and Danny Thompson, who's state president of the AFL-CIO right now, and those guys, it was like, you know, they, they carried the water. You know, well wait a minute, what are you guys gonna do for Henderson? Oh, well, we'll do something. What do you want us to do kind of a thing? And so, anyway, as we began to start really getting ourselves organized out here, every once in a while they'd notice, the powers that be would notice we'd get something done. Yeah, yeah, you know, even a blind squirrel finds some acorn here and there, you know, type of thing. But we were really... It's good that we had that, you know, cloak of... And so by the time we got to where we, we had stuff, they looked around and said, holy cow. You know, I mean, now we gotta reckon with those guys, you know, and they did have to reckon with us. And so, it was kind of a coming around type of thing, you know. We were doing things on our own and this and that and the other thing. Finally when we were able to step forward into the sunshine, you know, and they began to... Well, wait a minute. What are those guys doing again? You know, it really, it really, it was kind of nice.

Interviewer: Right. So you put your, I mean, you put yourselves and the City on the radar.

Gary: We did...

Interviewer: Without a lot of external help.

Gary: We really did and then you know, then you know, Henderson, you know, land-wise, with all the annexations and everything, began to be the largest city, area-wise in the state, you know. And that's before Green Valley West and all of that sort of stuff got going. And, but now Boulder City is because it's got all of El Dorado Valley, that's all part of Boulder City. They're the largest land-holder city, and we're number two.

Interviewer: Oh, OK.

Gary: Yeah, we're number two. But what happened was it, is we began to annex pieces. See, there's Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, and the rest was the County, and then Henderson. Well, we began to annex pieces into Henderson, and by the time we got down to just past Henderson airport, you know, the City of Las Vegas said, holy cow, those guys are surrounding us. You know, and that's kinda, I guess that's true, but we weren't really thinking like that. But, I mean, we were taking on everything so got the legislature that said, no more annexations, you know. So that kinda shut us off.

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Gary: Because they, then their argument was – and a good one – they said, those guys can't even service that stuff. You know, I mean, they got all that land, and they got a little teeny police department, fire department and this and that and the other thing, you know. They can't even service what they got, which is true. You know, but they could see what was happening, and the County wasn't excited about it either because we were going around and pretty soon we were gonna, you know, we were right up against the Strip in some areas. So they were not, the County Commission and the City of Las Vegas were not enthralled about what Henderson was doing out here.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: So, but that's OK. We had plenty of land, you know, and with the McDonald Ranch and all those others, that area out there, I used to ride my motorcycles out there, you know. And it was rocky, terrible stuff. You know, just like the airport was.

Interviewer: Just desert.

Gary: Oh, it was desert but it had boulders in it because of Black Mountain, you know, and it's all volcanic stuff. And when the Alper family had the airport, Arby Alper, he'd buy heavy earth-moving equipment, surplus stuff from the test site, take it out there, and even as robust as that stuff was, you know, it was down, broken and they had to fix it and this and that and the other thing, you know. But yeah, you know, we just went through the growing stages and, but then once the City got a little more sophisticated they started... He would just do whatever he wanted out there.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Gary: You know, he'd build this, he'd build that, and the tower, the original tower he got out there came from Nellis. You know, he bought it as surplus and so he bid on it as salvage, bought the tower, and the, and so anyway, he went out there on a Saturday with two flat-bed trucks because he had to take it in half, the canopy had to go here, and the legs on the other truck. And he went out there and he said, came through the gate and he said, we're ready to pick up the towers. He said, OK. So he went out there and they said, well, how are you gonna get it outta here? He says, oh, I'll get it outta here. He said, because it won't go through any of the gates. The canopy's too wide and too tall. He said, well, well, I'll, I'll figure that out. They said, OK. So he said, well, shut the, he said shut the runway down for 45 minutes. So they took the thing and, cranes, and put it on the trucks and then he rolled out to the end of the runway, and Las Vegas Boulevard was here, pulled the fence up, laid it down, and rolled out onto to Las Vegas Boulevard, and put the fence back. And oh my gosh, they came flying around... sirens going and everything, you just can't do that. He was on the other side of the fence by then, and he said, what do you want me to do, take it down and go back in or what? Nope. You just broke the law.

Interviewer: Well, done now.

Gary: So he took it you know and went and put it, and the, and then that was the centerpiece, and then he bought the steel from the old Mint Hotel and built the old building that they had down there around there. And he did, you know, I mean he didn't get permits, he used, you know, he did what he, the City was so far out there he didn't care. And then the City got sophisticated, started going out there saying, well now you gotta do this, and you can't do that, and he didn't like that 'cuz he was like doing whatever he wanted. And, you know, the City was saying, no, no, no, you can't do that anymore. And boy, that was, so he was at odds

with the City a lot, you know, because he didn't like the fact that they were making him toe the line. And he had to put in fire hydrants, and he had to do this and stuff like that, you know, but it was just a little mom-and-pop-y airport thing.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Gary: But, well he even, and I know I'm taking up the time, he owned part of Flamingo Road in front of Bally's, out to the middle. And the County, you know, graded it all out, made it all nice and paved it and this and that and the other thing, and he let them do it. And then when it got all done he went to the County and said, are you gonna buy this property from me? He said, what property? He said, well, I own out to the middle of Flamingo Road there. They said, oh, no, no, no you don't. He said, I do. I've been paying taxes on it. And so they checked. Sure enough he owned it. So then they tried to put an ordinance into effect that went back, you know, which you can't do. You can't go back, and so he went all the way to the Supreme Court. And won! So they had to give him a million dollars for the piece of property. He was a tricky guy, and he and his nephew, or no his uncle or brother or something, used to have two motels side by side on the Strip. One was the, the Glass Pool Inn, and it had glass, big glass so you could see people swimming in there. And the other one was the Pink Elephant, had a big pink elephant, you know. And so they were on a well together out here. And so the one, I don't remember who owned the Pink Elephant, but one of them owned the Pink Elephant, said to the guy, he said, wait a minute, you know, I'm paying half of the water and you use so much more water than I do. He said, I think we need to redo this contract here. And the other guy said, to heck with it, you know. A contract's a contract. And he said, well, that's not fair. He said, well, I don't care. So the guy from the Pink Elephant went over and shot holes in the Glass Pool Inn, windows, and all the water came out. So the guy went over with a baseball bat and knocked the trunk and the things... I mean, those were Wild West days, weren't they?

Interviewer: Oh, that's funny.

Gary: It is, it is. There's some real funny things that, you know, if you go back a long way.

Interviewer: So just one last question to sort of sum up. What do you, do you have any thoughts on Henderson's future, in terms of... things are sort of tough right now all over the place, and I know we've had a lot of people leave the area just generally...

Gary: Yes.

Interviewer: But what do you think are the prospects for Henderson as a City?

Gary: I think they're good. I'll tell you why, because I think Henderson has done a great job in comparison to the other communities of, of thinking big but not, you know, reaching for the stars, but they always had one foot on the ground. You know, I mean, they did. It was very, very, very good. They weren't trying to be the biggest and the fastest and the this, they just did it like you should do things. You know, they stayed pretty much within their means. And they made business, they made growth pay for itself. You know, yeah, there was a lot of fussing going on, you know, these companies come in there and they want the City to do this and that. The City would say, no, no, you have to put that infrastructure in. That's gonna have to be part of your project. You're gonna have to spread the cost over whatever the development is, you know. And, you know, they were wanting, they were like trying to get a bidding war between other areas, you know. So and so is gonna give us this and that and the other thing. Well, we didn't have very much to give. I mean, we really didn't. And we would tell 'em, look, you know we don't have any tax advantages to give you or this and that 'cuz that's state, county, this and that. But one thing you can be sure is that no one is gonna come in

behind you and get a better deal. Just like you want a better deal than the guy next door, and boy, people talk. People like to brag about their good deals. You know, they like to say, yeah well, let me tell you what we got, you know. Well, then that guy said, well, wait a minute, you know, I need a good deal, too. You know how that goes. So I'm sure we lost some because we wouldn't wrestle, but those that were here, you know, were here the same level as everybody else, and that was good. I mean, I think that was a good thing even though, you know, you're really wanting these because, you know, yes, they're good for your economy. They're great trophies, you know, the Levis and the, you know, the Ocean Sprays and stuff like that. The Gold Bond Ice Creams and everything. That was quite a deal, putting that Gold Bond Ice Cream thing together. The piece of property they picked was like, oh my gosh. There's no services out there. We have no, you know, infrastructure out there. They said, no, well, that's where we want to be. So then what we had to do was we had to get all the property owners around out there, and two of them were in court fighting over something. We had to get 'em all together to sign an agreement to be a co-op. They didn't have to pay for bringing the power in 'cuz Gold Bond used so much power. The gas company was, that was Southwest, it wasn't Southwest, it was CP National Gas was on that side of Lake Mead. Southwest Gas was right across the road, and they had gas service over there, but it would cost thousands and thousands of dollars to bring gas service up to the ice cream place, you know. And so we were able to arrange a trade, Southwest Gas and CP National, so that Southwest Gas got the part and CP National got the other part and they were able to run the line, you know, run the line in there.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Gary: And so the City had to be a part because they owned property out there, and all they did was say, OK, well, we'll give the right of way, and we'll run the sewer and the water, you know, similar to what we did with the college. You know, we can't put any money into the deal. This is what we'll do.

Interviewer: Right.

Gary: And so everybody... Otherwise Calico Ridge would have never been the size it is now because they were out, they had a little, I don't know, 2-inch line or something like that, feeding that, those developments out there. And they couldn't have done any more than just a few more houses. That would have been it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: They were all out of water. So it worked out. It really did. And all of the exp, all of the ongoing guaranteed costs were absorbed by the... I mean, because they used that much power, that much gas, you know, at the ice cream factory.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Gary: So they couldn't have picked a worse place to go. It's like, you don't really wanna go out there, do you? Yes, that's where we wanna go. So, boy, it took some scrambling. It really did. We didn't wanna lose 'em, but we didn't know how we were gonna do this...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: So we were kind of flying blind.

Interviewer: It seems like the City's been through a number of deals like that where they've just made it work, but it's been...

Gary: Made it work.

Interviewer: But it's been an adventure.

Gary: Boulder Highway project's one of 'em, too.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: You know, doing all the... I mean, it's just... you have to have commitment and endurance, and you'll develop the talent. It happens every time. You just gotta have commitment and endurance. And we were so stupid, we didn't know that you couldn't do that sort of thing. I mean, really.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Gary: I said, well, why can't we? Well, because. We don't see it that way, so we'd just get out there and start doing it, and it would happen. That's exactly what happened with the City and the County. Said, those guys will never get that stuff done out there, you know, then all of a sudden, boom, you know. There it was. Oh, shoot. You know, and Henderson, the City of Henderson owns the top of Black Mountain.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Gary: Yeah, where all those antennas and stuff are up there, they own that.

Interviewer: Interesting, I didn't know that.

Gary: Yeah, mm-hmm. I think they still own it. I mean, good grief, it turned out to be a real coup to have that, you know. I mean, there was only one, the original one up there was TV-5 when they were down on Boulder Highway, the old gas station down there, near Sunset. And they put the road in and had the power run up there so they could put the, their thing up there. And, of course, the others, others, it's a hot dog place. I mean, you can cover the whole Valley, you know, the whole Valley from there. And most everybody went up there except TV-8 went over on the next mountain over. In the older area of Henderson there was a blackout area for TV-8 'cuz Black Mountain shadowed the thing. Although they did on Red Mountain in Boulder City, they'd kick the signal there and then kick it back, and Red Mountain was where they'd get all their transmitted TV stations from here, you know, goes through Red Mountain. Anyway, I've taken up enough of your time.

Interviewer: Well, thanks again. Thanks so much for coming in. We really appreciate it.