

Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County, Illinois

Hal Patton Oral History Interview

Steve Hansen, Interviewer

February 27, 2018

Steve Hansen (SH): Just, just um to recap what, what we'll do is uh, I'll have the recording transcribed, you'll get a chance to read the transcription, edit it in any way you want, and add, subtract. We will do so with the digital recording at the same time [This is inaccurate, *Madison Historical* does not edit the audio for an oral history]. When you then approve it, we'll then load it up on the website and it will be in the archives and available for people who listen to, to study, to use in their research.

Hal Patton (HP): That's fantastic

SH: Madison County. So we've, we've, we've got about, I think thirty oral histories up so far. Uh, and we're trying to do at least ten a year, or fifteen a year depending upon how many students we can get.

HP: Sure, I love the old stories. I love listening to Bill Haine, the person I am running for his seat. If you've ever heard a Bill Haine's story, you know, he's just, he's fascinating how many things he was connected to and who he knows and how he connects it to American history. Ben Dickman was really good too.

SH: Well, so today is February 27, 2018. We're talking with a, with Hal Patton. So Hal, tell me a little bit about, about your background. (01:13)

HP: Sure, I was born here in Edwardsville and

SH: ...closer to, um...

HP: ...sure. June 3, 1968. And lived in the LeClaire lake area for about a year and that's where my family lived when I was born but we moved, um, to Grand View subdivision which was a relatively new subdivision in town when I was about a year and a half old and that really, I think, led a lot to the person I am today. Met a lot great people in Grand View, had an opportunity to, as I think one of the important things is to have a woods near by to go play in, a creek to get muddy in. We have some very influential people in Grand View for being a small subdivision. Former Mayor of Edwardsville Gary Niebur grew up down the street and he was mayor for twenty years so I think he was an influence that I met there. But um, met three of my best friends that I still have close friendships today and they're in different professions. One's a medical doctor and the other two are carpenters. But we still hangout with each other and just always remember the opportunities that Edwardsville provided whether it was little league, or whether it was a great parochial school that I attended or just different, different things that made you, made you feel like you were safe. You know when I was a youngster, just like we try to push today with public safety, I want to make sure that the families have that same opportunity that I had when I was little. To get on my bike and be told I had to be back in two hours. I didn't have to be told where I was going, you know, and I think that's a neat thing about Edwardsville and the small town that we still had

in, in those seventies and eighties. But I am hoping that parents can still enjoy that today. So that's a little bit about my background. I did attend Ed O. Nelson elementary school and went to St. Mary's grade school as well before coming back to the junior high and graduated from Edwardsville Senior High in 1986. (03:13)

SH: Did, did, um you say you, you grew up and got to ride your bike all around town. Was Edwardsville a fairly small town in the sixties? (03:26)

HP: I think there was maybe 12,000 in town. 12,000 to 15,000 seems to be what I remember the entry signs and that would've been in the late seventies and early eighties. One of my stories, one of my close friends that I mentioned earlier, we would leave the house and he was known to wander way worse than. He would be out all day at times and when he was young his mom clipped a clothespin, not a clothes pin but a safety pin, excuse me, to his shirt and said my name is ... and if found please call.

SH: [laughs]

HP: [chuckles] And out he would go. So, I think that's a sign of pretty safe community. Pretty neat thing to grow up under that type of freedom and those opportunities. So we're, we did a lot of exploring. Whether it be the old railroad tracks or the Legion Golf Course or visiting the new subdivisions so we could hopefully pick up some wood that we could use for our next treehouse or fort down in the woods. But uh, lot of fun growing up under those circumstances and again the city, you know, had a good park system. It had little league and the basketball leagues, so enough... (04:32)

SH: [inaudible] and safety is one of the things that you felt safe going up as a child and in Edwardsville and Edwardsville's reputation for being safe today. But how else would you contrast and compare Edwardsville then to how it is now? (04:52)

HP: Well, I think the focus we have on education, having SIU in town. I remember some of my neighbors, that I enjoyed playing with the kids, their parents were instructors out at SIU and unfortunately that meant that sometimes they would move because the parent would get another offer from another university. But um, I knew that, um that level, the university education was important to the community. The school district itself, we were very competitive academically and very competitive in sports and extracurriculars back when I grew up. Which is similar to today but I think even more so. I think the school has grown in its reputation and its prestige, um both Edwardsville High School and SIU. I don't think there's, there's really a limit on, on that positive energy that that brings when you have a great school district and great opportunity to get your secondary education in the same town that you grew up in. That's what my son is doing now and he literally has told me, he said, "Dad I love Edwardsville why would I leave?" and I can go out to SIU and feel great about getting the next level of education that I need for my career. So, those are, those are realities, we always push that. You know, Edwardsville always said, "We want to be safe, we want variety of good education, and um we want to be good neighbors." I have noticed that as I have traveled around this country. I spent four years down in Louisiana getting a biology degree at Centenary College and then I went up to Minnesota for dental school for four years, no offense to SIU's program, but I needed to be away somewhere where I could study [chuckle] and not be pestered by [chuckles] the temptations of my friends. But I thought the great white north in Minneapolis would be a good place for that. But, you know the, the um, the fact that, you know, when I went to those

areas. The South is supposed to be known as being, you know, super social and super friendly, but they didn't even compare to the people that I remember from Edwardsville and our approach to new neighbors and our approach to people that we meet in town. We're a place where you, you still hold the door for people and you do it because that is the way you were raised and you enjoy that, um, feeling helping others, you know, whether it be um, a community project or something at the church. We have tremendous apt for volunteerism and I think the school district continues to push that and teach that. So, when you see all of the different special parks, the watershed, the Children's Museum, um Stephenson House, or, you know, you even take that to our little league coaches and soccer program, the YMCA soccer program. Tremendous amount of volunteerism and tremendous amount of community spirit, and um, I didn't see that, and I really don't see that as much as when I traveled to the other areas in the country as I see here. They're some areas that may be close, and maybe I missing, but I think we have something special here in regards to the... (07:51)

SH: Has, has the sense of community, um, changed at all with the growth and the population, you think? (08:08)

HP: I haven't really noticed it as much I think what we've done is we've encouraged the people that do move in, to have that same attitude, that same spirit of, of community and volunteerism and keeping the community safe. You know we talk about the school district getting bigger, um and that bringing in potential challenges. But I remember early on, saying, yeah we have 7,500 students at our school but that means we have 15,000 eyes and 15,000 ears. And we need to let them know what it's like to be a member of this community and they need to speak up when they see something that offends them and they need to let others adults know, you know, there is something that scares them that we need to do better. So, we have grown. I go to restaurants now thinking that, oh man I don't go in there thinking that I don't go in there because I am going to see 100 people that I know and, of the 100 I may only know three or four. You know, there's been so much new growth and visitors coming in. Uh but, there's other, other circles that you hang in and again it's probably those volunteerism circles where you end up doing a lot with the Rotary and you see members of the Rotary that you've been volunteering with for over twenty years. (09:11)

SH: So what, what gives that community its, its sense of itself? Mentions school are important, you said parks, uh, and um organizations like Rotary, the YMCA, all kind of help form a sense of who we are, of, of a community.

HP: Sure

SH: Are there other, are there other institutions that, that kind of help shape that and hold us together? (09:50)

HP: Sure, I mean the, the churches. You know, all, all these special things we have here they're not amenities that the city provides. You know, these are amenities that volunteer groups, um passionate parents, you know, people that grew up with this as part of their expectation or desire to have. They've kept these things going. You know, whether it be the Bonifest, you know, or the Apple-fest, or there's, there's just, Habitat for Humanity. There's countless opportunities for individuals in this community to give back. And I think when you, when you give something and you get something back you're hooked.

You know, you've participated in a system that makes you feel good because you've volunteered and then in return you look around and say, wow, we all have done this. It's, it's an all-in situation and I think people that'll move here, they get, they get trapped into that. They, they figure out they're going to participate. Junior service for example, you know what a fantastic organization that um, provides money for playgrounds and um money for special programs for kids that don't have the opportunities that some others might. So, it's, if you live in this community and you don't step it up, I think you feel like there's some pressure on ya. I need to, I need to do something to make this community what it is or make it whole. And a lot of people have done that and we're, we're the beneficiaries, we all are. (11:04)

SH: Some people have argued that, that Edwardsville has moved from a small town to a kind of commuter bedroom suburb. I don't know if that's true or not. What is your take? (11:34)

HP: Well I know that when, when I was growing up we were known as a bedroom community. Meaning that most people worked over in St. Louis or worked at Scott Air Force Base, or someplace other than Edwardsville. And we have definitely changed that. Um, I've been fortunate, you know, to be here for fifty years. I wish, I hope I can see what it looks like in thirty and forty years because we have so much opportunity and, and moving forward but still retaining the things that we all like about Edwardsville. Um, but we're no longer a bedroom community because we have over 40,000 people that work in Edwardsville every day. So, if we have a population of 26,000 now but 40,000 come here to work, we're not all leaving. There's quite a few people employed by the university, by Madison County government, but we have over 6,000 down at the Enterprise Zones working with World Wide Technology or Amazon. We added some headquarters with Prairie Farms and Scott Credit Union, so, 40,000 people working here, we have about 45,000 um, students at different levels from the school district to um, I need to correct that, we have about 25,000 students from the university to Lewis and Clark to district 7 to our parochial schools. So, that's a tremendous uh day time number. Edwardsville is pretty dynamic during the day and, and now I think people are starting to visit here more often for the night life whether they be our good restaurants uh coming to the Wildey Theater, events out at SIU, or sporting events for the school district. We've seen a steady increase, more than steady, about a 6% increase in sales tax revenue coming in every year um just because of the attractive businesses that we've um been able to put in place and support. But uh it's changed certainty from when I grew up but I don't think it has lost its charm or its character. (13:25)

SH: Yeah, I think, I think that's, that's something that people will wanna study. How is it that some communities um, change and they do lose their character. They, they become very, um maybe bland uh, because they're all commuters and it's just a bedroom community. But Edwardsville has, does have this, this character about it and uh, how we have been able to hold on to that is something that, that's worth exploring and to study. (14:11)

HP: Yeah, cause um there's a lot of pride in our surrounding communities, I've heard wonderful things about East St. Louis, you know, fifty years ago, it was the place to be, the place to have a business. Granite City, great, you know, jobs there at one point and the school district had some of the best performing extracurricular teams, you know. Now, the, the answer to both of those places is you have to retain your people. If you want to retain the attitude and the, the character and the quality of your community you need to keep those people in. And have the amenities, have the nice subdivision housing choices, um have, you know, good restaurants and, and good job opportunities to have them stay. If, if

you just raise them here and they all leave you kind of lose that feel. And I think, I've seen some of that in my dental practice where we have tremendous number of people living up on the bluffs that used to live down in the industrial areas and now they've come up here for housing and the quality of the schools and the safety. So, we better keep those three things, you know, the good infrastructure, quality schools, and uh the safety. Uh if we don't keep those three things strong then we'll see a, an exodus or a flight and then I think the charm and the character uh, could go with it because people just, you know, have, have come to a level of expectation and they, they don't mind participating in that and producing that. So...(15:18)

SH: How did you decide to become a dentist? (15:36)

HP: You know what, growing up I played a lot, my, my father played a lot of golf and he encouraged me to play golf with him and I enjoyed it. Um, met a lot of, um different individuals at those golf courses but several of my friends um had parents who were in dentistry. So I was able to observe them, um literally going through their offices and kind of checking things out.

Um, I had an unfortunate incident when I was about 10 years old, that I was hit in the mouth with a baseball bat in a, in a corner lot game. We were just playing in our subdivision and uh, I accidentally got hit in the mouth with the bat. So I went to the dentist quite a bit for a stretch there and it just kind of caught that this was a pretty neat profession, something I'd like to do to help people overcome fear and um, be, you know, attention to detail. I like, I like the detail and the artistic aspects of dentistry as well. So, my sister kind of capped it off for me, she went to Carbondale, um SIU Carbondale for, um, a hygiene degree, she's a dental hygienist. So, she went um there, she's four years older than I am so that kind of really solidified it. I went away to school thinking I was gonna pre-med or pre-dent and um, that's what my biology degree was for and it just so happened that the dentistry was more appealing. (16:36)

SH: And your, you, did you always think you'd come back to Edwardsville and set up a practice? (16:56)

HP: You know, I really did. Um I, I had opportunities in Minnesota to stay up there and to partner with different groups or different individuals um, but I wanted to come back to Edwardsville. So I searched out here to see if any, um, providers were looking for partnerships or selling their practices and there wasn't, uh, that opportunity. I had a, I had one interview but the individual decided not to have, uh, expand the practice into a partnership. So I just set up my shop and it was fortunate because I set it up and the former mayor, uh, Steve Ellsworth's building. And Steve and I, uh became very close over that twenty years um that I, my first twenty years in business. And uh, he was just, just a rock of the community. I mean he, he had such a wonderful demeanor and uh work ethic and really knew how to make friends and make family out of his clients. And so I emulated that [chuckles]. Tried to do my best to uh, to take that same approach with building my dental practice. And um, so that's how I came back, you know. But dentistry was, it was a good choice for me. I, I like again, the detail of it and the patient communication. I think that's been something that's kind of drug into my politics. Patients like to talk. They like to talk politics with me, and um, it's a good distraction from the dentistry. [chuckles] (18:09)

SH: And how did you get involved in politics? What, what sparked your interest? (18:25)

HP: Um so, I wanted to be a a part of the community, came back and Gary was mayor and I knew Gary from growing up and so I set up a meeting with him. I called him and said hey I would like to go out to

lunch and see what it's about, you know, being an alderman. Now, I have my grandfather, um, Spike Riley was an alderman in five different decades. Not for fifty years, but five different decades. He served um, in Edwardsville and he was also on, a volunteer fireman which was a big thing back then to be involved with the community. So, um, I knew about it, I knew a little bit and that, that I'd be interested in that. And Gary said, yeah you know we've got, we're gonna have a spot open in a couple of years and so if you want uh some advice or some help running and just turned out that it was an, an open seat the first time I ran, or there was two of us running for two spots. So, um I got, I got involved with a very impressive group of alderman, not to, to, toot your hats since your from SIU, Rich Madison, Rich Walker, Janet Hurorian, um there were quite a few SIU employees or representatives that were serving. And uh, I was pretty young at the time, I, um I, I listened a lot and learned from them and we just uh sat back and watched what I thought was, was good public input and public service by those individuals. (19:35)

SH: When, when was this that you had your first... (19:48)

HP: 1998. So, I would've been thirty. I think I was elected when I was twenty-nine, but um, thirty years old. I, I came back to Edwardsville at the age of 25 or 26 to start my practice. (19:48)

SH: So, wha, excuse me for interrupting. Were aldermen elected at large and not, not by ward? (20:04)

HP: They were elected by ward but then we had two aldermen per ward so there was fourteen council members where today there's only seven.

SH: Oh.

HP: So, when there was fourteen in, um, there were two per ward and there were two of us. It was an engineer Sue, I cannot remember Sue's last name, but she was a civil engineer and she wanted to run for office and I did, and there just happened to be two open spots, um in that, in our ward. So...(20:17)

SH: Not Sue Morgan? (20:29)

HP: No, not Sue Morgan. Um she wasn't here very long. She was a professional engineer and she was in and out, but she, uh and I ran at the same time and um yeah, but I, I really, like I said enjoyed uh those individuals, uh especially Rich Madison. Rich Madison also grew up in Grandview so, same street, Sunset Drive right down the street from me. He would've been on one end and Gary Nieber would've been on the other end and my house would've been in the middle. So, we've had quite a, quite a bit of representation, uh from Grand View over the years. (20:50)

SH: And what, what ward was that, that you were representing? (21:06)

HP: I think it was seven at the time. But it was out, we rented um, a place out near Sunset Hills, uh for the first five years, six years that we were back here. And uh saved up to finally build a house over on, in Homes of Center Grove, off Center Grove Road. But, during those first years I was an alderman I was, I was renting and then I moved into the house. The house we moved into was still in the same ward so I was able to continue service. I served as alderman for six years and then, um, left to, uh go to the county board. I was the first republican elected uh from Edwardsville on the county board in fifty-four years. Which was, was kind of neat and I stayed there for ten years uh serving on different committees making,

I think, some real positive changes at the county. The park program is kind of our judicial reputation was something I took on and um certainly government accountability. There was some pension issues uh that weren't very positive back then with people bumping their own pensions and um supporting others to move into higher pensions. It's just things that I thought was fiscal waste. (22:02)

SH: Talk about the judicial issue that you, of the interior. (22:16)

HP: Well, you know uh, Edwardsville being the county seat um we've had uh a reputation of having a lot of attorneys here and uh [chuckles]. I can say that without being mean because my dad's an attorney, my dad's a patent attorney and so, he challenges me, or has challenged me on the law for many, many years growing up and uh even today. But, I think there needed to be a better balance. We were seeing a lot of out of county cases coming into our court system and a lot of, of um, heavy support for the plaintiffs side. And the defense, um wasn't as uh successful or as robust as some of us thought that they should've been to give proper balance. Um, one of the examples, you know class action lawsuits were real popular then. It was 186 dollars to file a class action lawsuit but literally this settlements of those could be in the billions of dollars. And so, individuals were coming to our courthouses, to our community potentially making millions, or hundreds of millions of dollars. And um in the meantime we weren't receiving those rewards and we were dealing with the reputation of being uh, uh place that was pretty anti-business. And I saw that personally with the medical malpractice insurance situation. My insurance as a dentist wasn't very high but an OBGYN was paying 160,000 dollars a year and for them to leave they had to provide a tail coverage insurance after they left to the same tune of about 160,000 dollars. And the points that I was making was that same individual practicing, maybe seeing the exact same patients in the county right next to ours, the premiums would have been about half, 60%. Just because the insurance company said, oh you're in Madison County. Right, wrong, or indifferent they didn't think they had a fair shake here so we needed to clean up the reputation and if necessary clean up the process. Um and I think, I think we did a good job of that without, you know, tipping the apple cart. There, there are some, there's some bad businesses out there that harm people and harm their employees and they need to be held accountable. Um, but there's also, in my opinion, the need for that, that support and that financial benefit to go to those people that were harmed. And so it's a balance, a system that needs to be balanced, and when I first got elected I don't think that balance was there. (24:35)

SH: You served on the county board from what, from when to when? (24:44)

HP: It would've been '92 to, um, to 2012. Yeah, I became mayor here in ... (24:54)

SH: '92? (24:55)

HP: Excuse me, 2002, yeah, 2002 to 2012 and then became mayor in 2013. (24:56)

SH: When did it first, uh, the idea come into your head that you wanted to run for mayor? (25:08)

HP: Well uh, Gary had, had served, Gary Niebur had served for that 20 year period. And he and I would talk on the phone quite regularly and uh, I'd ask him, you know, if you're going to run for another term um I certainly wouldn't have challenged him. I think he did a great job for our community. Um, not only leading the growth in the success of the YMCA but really building the infrastructure in Edwardsville, uh the way he did with our water plant, our sewer plant, bringing on the Enterprise Zone, so many different

things. So, if he was gonna run again I certainly was just gonna stay at the county board and continue my efforts there. But when he decided that he was not going to run for reelection that's when I kind of talked with some people and I had, honestly had some people approach me and said, hey we think you would be the kind of person that would be able to come in after Gary and keep things going. So, that's when it started and um, I see, you know, you asked a question what is it like to campaign for office. You know it's, it's tough. You know, you spend a lot of time, you put a lot of, um, mental equity into it. You know, a lot of nights you go to bed and you stare at the ceiling because you're wondering if you did everything right that day or if what you're going to do tomorrow. So I don't want to say there were sleepless nights but there were certainly sleep impaired [laughs]...

SH: [laughs]

HP: ...evenings. But um, and you also, you know the criticism that comes along with running for office. It's unfortunate that when you have to declare a party that there's, you know, maybe 40% of the people already don't like you or question you, um, in a different way. Um and it's also difficult to please everyone. You know, in a, in a town of 26,000 you're going to have people that you'll never make happy. And so you have to happy pretty thick skin to deal with um the ups and downs of campaigning and the ups and downs of service. Um I think one of the, the uh, personality traits that I have is I don't take things super personally, you know, I take it, if it's a pol- political thing, I just, sometimes we agree to disagree and we move on. As long as people don't take it personally with me, you know and, and take it to my business or take it to my family, I can, I can have pretty thick skin and I'm pretty quick to forgive people when it comes to politics. Um, just move on and move to the next issue, and um, not um, not do it for, you know, the selfish reasons. I think when people get in trouble in politics it's because they take it so personally 'cause it's something that they think they have to have themselves. Where if you're just trying to represent the people and make the community better, uh that's, it's a lot easier if you have that attitude. My satisfaction, you know, I, I do, you receive probably more criticism than you do complements, but uh, at first, but when a community is having success like we are and we've got great employees working very hard to, to build that success um we get a lot of complements now, which is nice. But I think I got two nasty emails today. So we still get the bad ones. [laughs] (28:03)

SH: [laughs] Did you have opposition when you ran for mayor? (28:12)

HP: I did, yes, um Barb Stamer uh who is somebody that I served with on the city council and she had been an alderperson for twenty years. Uh she ran for this seat as well. So, um she had a lot of support from the city council members which was natural, she had been there. I'd been at the county board, you know, for ten years. And um, that was interesting because I was successful in the election but coming into an environment where five out of the six alderman had really rooted for her. You know, and I, I understood that because of the personal relationships, but again as I just mentioned I, I want to move beyond the personal, you know, what's best for the community and not what's best for me or for Barb. Um so, soon as they realized that that's what we, that's what the agenda was, you know, how do we, how do we make this town even better than it is. Um they came, they came around but, yeah, that was- it's never fun running against someone because you don't, you don't wanna be on the losing end and you don't necessary want them to be on the losing end either cause um, you know, it's, it's tough to, it's tough to run and it's tough to serve but um ... (29:17)

SH: Talk a little bit more about how you run for mayor when you have to, what do you do, do you, do you walk the precincts? (29:25)

HP: Yeah, you definitely have to walk. Gene Meyers from Troy, when I was running for the county board one time, she said, you have to literally wear out a pair of tennis shoes, maybe two. And so there's a lot of walking and knocking and um introducing yourself um and that's, it's really awkward the first door, the first two doors. It's, it's the worst going up to that first door at the beginning of an election cycle because you don't know how you're gonna be received. But, once you do get a positive reception it becomes, um, very contagious, you know, you're able to open people up a little bit. Ask them what's going well, what needs to be worked on, you know, what a, tell them a little bit about your qualifications and uh go to the next door. But yeah, it's, it's interesting. I've had just really honestly two or three nasty interactions at doors and I've probably knocked on, I don't know, 10,000 doors. You know so I, I campaigned through the county at large one time and I knocked on doors in Madison and Highland and Alton, every city in the county and um so, it's, it's interesting. But yeah if, if somebody can do that without having a little bit of uh butterflies in their stomach you know, their, their different than I am. But a lot of people I've talked to have that same feeling, that first couple of doors is pretty tough. You put a walk piece together you know, what your objectives are and what your background is and you hand that out as informational. Um you have to put a campaign team together to raise some funds, uh help with some of the challenges of putting events on. And um you, you know, rely on them for feedback whether they like your walk piece or whether they think you should be talking or going in a different direction or an issue. So, that's, that's, that's 101, you know [chuckles], running for office 101 it's, it's it can get a lot more detailed and a lot more scary. Editorials, you know, talking with newspaper people, writing letters to the editor there's, there's a lot more out there that you have to be careful with, um, but, I, I found it you know, just be natural, be yourself if people don't like ya [chuckles] it doesn't mean [chuckles] they, they don't like ya as a person, I mean they don't like your political views and they're not gonna to support your political views and so you just, again, don't take it personal. (31:51)

SH: Did, did you have to go out to a lot of events? Uh, eat a lot of rubber chicken? (31:57)

HP: Yeah,[chuckles] yeah there's a lot a, a lot of hand shaking that can occur. A lot of evenings where you may want to stay at home uh with your family but you should really go out and talk with individuals. Edwardsville has a lot of events to raise money uh for different causes and I think it is important as a business owner and as a resident and somebody running for office to be there to support them, thank them, and, and try to give those causes what you can. Either, now a days I, I do a lot of, I'll do some MCing or I'll do some presenting and um I'm not a, I'm not the most natural public speaker but I've found over the years as you learn more about a subject it becomes a lot easier to talk about it. If you, you got more information than the rest of the people in the room, um you shouldn't be nervous about speaking the rest of the room. So, that's kind of the approach I take now, but um, fortunately we have a lot going on. And the public likes to hear what is going on so as long as I get up and talk about that seems to go pretty well. (32:55)

SH: Is, is, um there's been a lot of talk about the influence of money in campaigns uh, did that, did that have a play in your mayoral campaigns? (33:09)

HP: You know, it didn't in the mayoral campaign, I'm seeing it a lot more now that I am running for state

senate. Um, you know, an alderman could raise anywhere from 2 to 5 thousand dollars. I think at the mayoral election, because it was the first time in twenty years, there was more money put into that one. I want to say that each side put in between 30 and 45 thousand, would be my guess. Certainly that's more than I would've ever wanted to, but by the time you pay for ads, you know, pay for signs, pay for mailings, uh trying to get the message out there um, you know. Now, at the state level it's millions of dollars and the influence that comes in and the amount of postcards. I don't believe you need to throw out 20 negative postcards about your opponent. I think if you can say this is me, this is who I'm running against, these are the issues that I care about. Um but unfortunately at this, at this next level uh there's, there's way too much money. (34:80)

SH: Is, is...

HP: Based bat [?]

SH: ...at, at the mayor and city level, was there much political party involvement or is that pretty non-partisan? (34:21)

HP: You know, I think it was there because I was a republican on the county board and so I think there was some people that thought that I would bring the republican ideology to office, you know, or maybe create a partisan. In fact, I received a couple of letters, asking, people asking me not to do this because they're afraid that it was gonna become partisan. And um, those individuals didn't know me very well, you know, didn't know my passion for the community and not for the party uh aspect of things. Um, at the county you have to declare. You know, so, when you, you have to give a choice, do you like what the democrats are doing or do you like what the republicans are doing? And so that's the choice that I made when I first ran. At the city, you know, being an independent position it's a lot better. But, unfortunately during campaigns people want to bring in that, that party, you know, that background of, you know, well you voted against this one time, or you know, at a national level that party is doing a terrible job so we're gonna assume you're gonna do a terrible job at this local level. So, I, I, and I did get some of it, but I didn't. I don't know. I, I didn't let that stop me. [chuckles] (35:25)

SH: But, but now, now that you're running for state senate um how did, how did that process work for you, you said you, you set up press release announcing you were gonna run, did you talk with, um, republican party, county party, central committee first or ... (35:44)

HP: Yeah I, I talked with um, an individual that works for uh, representative Shimkus and um I was just kind of keeping tabs through her who was running for the local races for uh the state office. And my typical approach is that if there's somebody running that I respect, that I think will do a good job, um I just stay out of it and say, awesome. I'll, I'll sit back and let that person, have my vote. And uh you know, I have voted for both parties, so sometimes if there's a person running in the Democratic Party that I have that same respect or admiration for I, you know, can sit back and say, I don't need to run against that individual. The state senate situation was, was different 'cause it was wide open. Senator Haine, another, you know, an individual that I respect, um, was in that position and he was retiring. He's been at it a, quite a few years and so, he wasn't going to run for reelection so it was an open seat. And um, I talked with, you know, a couple of individuals, said who's, who's running, you know, who do we have that's gonna step up? And um, there was an individual who was considering it who probably would've, I, I would've

stayed out of it and stayed mayor. Um, but then when, um, that individual decided not to seek the office, I said well, I, I will run, you know, at the senate. But I was recruited quite a bit to run at the rep um for the two year term but I didn't, I don't feel, the two year terms are, are ridiculous in my opinion. You know, you're in office for six months and you're out raising again to run for your next campaign. I don't think two year terms should exist, um, and certainly with the busyness of my dental practice and other things in my life um, I didn't wanna be, you know, on the representative side. So, when the senate side, site came open that was appealing to me to run for a four year term. Run in, uh you know, out of, yeah frustration that I'm not happy with where the state is going and what the state is doing. So what can I do to bring the principles or the experiences that I've had in my years in office, um, to make things better in Springfield whether that be a balance budget, whether that be cutting out waste, whether that be dealing with people across the aisle in a more professional way so that we can really see the issues for what they are and come up with real solutions. So I, I honestly getting tired of sitting back and, and watching it not go well. (38:09)

SH: Do you, um, since you haven't run the campaign yet, I, I, it's difficult to answer but, certainly state politics and issues are gonna get involved. What about national issues, do you think, do you think that's going to, in any way complicate, or how will it complicate your, your campaign? (38:23)

HP: Uh I, I definitely think that national politics will come in to play for some individuals. I mean, I remember knocking on doors when I was running for the county board as a board member and knocking on a door that said, the man said, I am not voting for any republicans this year, I'm tired of what's happening, you know, at the national level, and I'm just voting straight down the ticket. So you have individuals that do that and it's, it's disheartening because, you know, they could literally [chuckles] be voting for, you know, somebody off the wall or maybe there's no, not even an opponent over there. You know, you should really, I mean, I really encourage the general public to take the time to look at the individuals that are running, get a feel for whether they would be good representative for ya, and, and deal with it that way because if not, um you get the government you get. You get the government that somebody else selects for you if you're not willing to put the time in yourself. And so, in many cases when we, when we're dissatisfied with state and federal government but we haven't taken the time to, uh get to know the candidates, maybe ask them some questions, maybe give them a phone call. We spend lots of money sending out literature and trying to be in the newspaper, and you, you would still be amazed at the percentage of people that go to the polls that have no clue of anything about who they're voting for. (39:55)

SH: I, I heard that uh, that only 7% of the registered republicans voted for Trump, so I mean, it was so, it was like that was how low the turnout was during the primaries and that's uh, so he's able to secure the non-republican nomination on 7% of registered republicans. That, um, and I think when you figure out the turn out rate nationally uh and, you know, 51% something like that, it turns out to be only 23% of the voters elect our president.

HP: Right.

SH: So you're, you're right, and, and can get pretty discouraging. (40:38)

HP: Yeah, it's disappointing. And um I, I just, that's the number one thing I would encourage people both

at the federal and state, even at the local level, ask some questions, get to know the people that are running and put some time into it. Look at everything else we do in life, how much time do we put into, um, softball you know, or basketball, watching sports on TV or getting into different clubs? If you want real good government you got to participate. And fortunately, here at the city, we have some really good alderman, um, we have some very intelligent and, and community orientated alderman. I think that's why we're having really good success here and have for years. Gary did a, did a great job at putting a strong team of department heads around, a, a concerned group of aldermen. But, if you, if you get to the next level and it's all about money and lobbyists and special interests and you keep electing those same people who are feeding those lobbyists and special interests, um you get, you get what you vote for. You get what you didn't vote for. (41:47)

SH: Yea, yea that's right. What, there's, what are some of the challenges you face as being mayor with, with the growth in this area, work challenges that are not associated with growth? (41:57)

HP: Um, you know the, the main things that I have been able to focus on uh the changing campus out at SIUE was a great opportunity for us to build a better relationship with the university. For the longest time it was a commuter based university and now with more student housing and, on campus and off campus it's given us an opportunity to interact um in a much closer way. Bringing the students into the downtown and also, you know, forming the uh SIUE destination committee where we interact with new professors, um parents during the orientation. I think all of those are positive changes um that I wanted to pursue knowing the importance of SIUE to our community. So, that, that made um a natural move for me. Public safety wise we had some old facilities and there had been a study with different opinions I think, 11 options of where we could build new facilities and what would make the most sense. Didn't really explore how we were going to pay for them, I just looked at some different scenarios of where they might go. And um, I was able to get in and work with the university leadership and get a satellite station on the SIUE campus which, you know, gave me great, a great feeling to know that those students and faculty would be protected. Talked to the alderman, you know, about raising some money for that. You know, I had described as, as being mayor, if you had one parent that came in and said you didn't get to my daughter or you didn't get to my son in time, you know, um that would've not have sat well with me. Being somebody who's in the healthcare business and uh believes in protecting our citizens. So, we did that one and then we did the combined facility because our downtown station was way out of code, it didn't have the, the proper space, proper parking, handicap accessibility. Even the, the joint services we have now with both men and women serving in the police and fire department that facility didn't adequately allow that. So, we built the new combined facility which I think turned out really well. It was a challenge um to get, to get all of that architectural and all of the votes and all of the money to support that but we were able to do that. I'm working on parks, we added a spray and play park, and we have a sports park uh property purchased, and we're in the process of adding those facilities. And um working also on downtown parking. So, downtown parking, with the success of our downtown, um people find it to be a challenge to get down here at times and it impacts the success for our businesses, so we're looking at parking solution for downtown which I hope to be able to roll out here in 2018, at least a solution. I don't think we will see construction until '19. But uh, I've had great stride and great support from the local businesses and the property owners. And uh, the governmental support has been good too 'cause all of these things cost money and in order to get the money you have to build the relationships and be sure that the taxpayers support, you know, how we're going about that. (45:03)

SH: Why do you think Edwardsville's grown so much over the last twenty, thirty years? (45:03)

HP: I, I think it goes back to that safety and education that we talked about earlier. You know, if you can bring your family to a place and know that they're going to be safe and protected and you're also gonna get a good education and have plenty of things to do. Uh, we have, you know, endless opportunities each weekend to, to go out and do different things so that's, that's a big part of it. (45:33)

SH: Are there any, uh, what are the pressures on being mayor, what are the different tugs and pulls that you have to deal with? (45:43)

HP: Um, you know, you have to coordinate things that the aldermen choose to do. So, if the aldermen, you know, vote majority, wanna do something, then I like to, my rule then becomes uh coordinating the staff to implement that objective. So, um, I appoint the fire chief, police chief, city attorney, human resource director, public works director, all those people are appointed by me. So I have to make sure that we have quality professionals. Um, I work hand-in-hand with our city administrator who is here full-time. You know, this being a part-time mayoral job, Tim Harr is responsible for making sure that all of these projects that we do support come to fruition. Um, but before those votes take place often times, you know, we are behind the scenes formulating things for the aldermen to consider. You know, the aldermen are all so part-time. You know, they have day jobs. So, they expect us to come to them with solutions to their problems or ideas that other communities have used to improve, you know the, the quality of the community. So, we work half the time on creating new ideas and half the time on implementing those that are supported by the council and by the public. So, that's keeps you pretty busy. I know that, you know, I mentioned public safety, parking, and parks, the three "p's" are, you know, an area that I think we needed some improvement in and we're, we're making good progress on those. You have to have your city infrastructure, we, we're one of the few cities that operates its own water plant, its own sewer plant, we take care of all that infrastructure, we take care of our roads, which I think is a 125 miles, linear miles of roads. Um, quite a few parks you know, that we maintain and, and keep up. And then we have to run you know, the day to day services that you see. But police and fire are probably our two largest employee groups well they are our largest employee groups combined. So, we have 23, uh well, I guess now we've added the new station, we have 28 paramedics and firefighters on staff and we have 43, uh, police officers. So, keeping our streets safe, our neighborhoods safe, and in particular, our schools safe uh is a huge priority. But um that's, that's a challenge. I mean and just making sure you have good people. As I said earlier, you're gonna get some people that complain and you're, you're never gonna be able to please. But I think in general, you know, we're, we're working hard to make sure that the residents get a good value. There's a lot of talk right now, and I think, you know, if you listen to this fifty years from now there will be talk about property taxes, or taxes in general. And my attitude has always been, yeah you pay to live here. You might, you pay a little bit more than you might pay somewhere else, but what do you get for that money? You get a quality service, you get good value, and so the word that I often use is value. I've, we treat this like a business and a business gives you a good quality value for what you're paying, then you're gonna go back to that business or you're gonna be satisfied with that business and um so I, I push the staff to, you know, yeah we could cut property taxes but as we cut property taxes we cut services, as we cut services we cut quality, we cut corners, you know, cut, cut, cut, you end up with nothing. You know, but if you could add, um, new growth to the community and bring in more revenue and use that revenue to enhance the opportunities that the current residents have. Fix up the old streets, replace the sidewalks, add a new park, build a new fire station- those are things that I think add value.

And we, even though we get complaints about property taxes I don't think we get many complaints about the value that people get here. (49:17)

SH: How is it that, that the uh that, that the city will say well the land [inaudible] can convince them come and build? (49:27)

HP: So, yeah big companies like World Wide and Amazon uh we're very fortunate that we have the Enterprise Zone down there which allows us to, uh make property taxes...

SH: When you say down there you mean, the uh...

HP: In the, in the lower, the bluffs.

SH: Below the bluff?

HS: Below the bluffs yeah, the American Bottoms. Um so, there's these Enterprise Zones, I think there's like 100 of them across the state. And you have petition to become one and the county and city of Edwardsville and city of Pontoon Beach put in uh, uh request and we've received that now and it'll be, I think it'll be forty years of Enterprise Zone activity that we'll have in total. Uh, but during those years, for the first seven year that a business is down there, the property taxes are 100% abated. They pay zero for seven years. Um, now they still employ people from your community and those people pay income tax, so the state still benefits, you know, from having those jobs there. Um, and the community does too because you've people that can afford to live in their homes, and you know, shop in their community etc. So, we give up property taxes for seven years, um, theorizing that, you know, those business don't add any strain to our school system, you know, they're not uh going to school uh from there, they're actually just working there. So we've, we've done that abatement, and um, the developer down there uh, Mike Towerman, uh has been very aggressive at luring businesses um, putting his own capital up, his team's' capital up to build some facilities. They'll build those 760,000 square foot facilities on, on speculation. Um, might be 30 to 40 million dollars for them to put that in place. And then they go out and try to find a company to lease that space. And so Amazon, growing as rapidly as they are, they needed, um, very quick move in time, uh they wanted these facilities built and wanted to get into them quickly. So, fortunately Mike had one built and the individuals over on, um the Lake View side um had another large warehouse built and between the two of them they were able to negotiate um leases with Amazon. We were told that Amazon was looking in the area, but that area was including St. Louis proper, as well as Memphis. And we were told that, that they were looking at two sites in Edwardsville and we were hoping, with our fingers crossed, that we would get one of them. And then, you know, Christmas came early and they said we're picking both of them. And so both of the sites in Edwardsville, one in Lake View and one in Gateway commerce um, became Amazon centers and then at that point we don't even know what that means, you know. How many jobs does that truly mean? Um, and now we look back at the numbers, each one of those facilities during normal time will employ about 1,000 people. During peak operation it will go up another three or four hundred at each facility. And um, we looked at some numbers provided by the transportation uh group MCT Madison County Transit and uh 62,000 employees worked down in Gateway. And of those like 1490 come from Granite City, 980 come from Alton, only 138 come from Edwardsville. So the, the Enterprise Zone and the Gateway Commerce and the Lakeview Commerce are, you know, a benefit to the entire region um that the city of Edwardsville

has abated property tax for, for seven years. But we're able to produce a lot of jobs and benefit and now we've started to see revenue come out of there so it's not just a freebee, these companies are not leaving. There's about 29 large facilities down there and um, about half of those are now paying full tax. So, uh Granite City School District, even though none of the businesses are in Granite City, they're either in Pontoon Beach or Edwardsville, Granite City School District got 2.1 million dollars last year uh in tax revenue from those businesses. City of Edwardsville got about 800,000 um, from those businesses. (53:27)

SH: Wow.

HP: So...

SH: Didn't Edwardsville specifically move its, its borders to encompass uh the bottoms? (53:36)

HP: Right, we annexed out um as the developer had requested so the people who had bought the property created the Enterprise Zone and said we would like Edwardsville to annex us because of um a couple things. The services, we have the water plant, as I had mentioned earlier, the sewer plant, so our rates are really, really low. What we sell water for and what we treat the sewage for is, uh, some of the lowest in all of Illinois. And then um the other aspect is we have a very quality fire and police department and they wanted those safety features to be associated with their facility so they asked for annexation um because we could provide the services. (54:11)

SH: You roughly remember when that was? (54:13)

HP: Yeah, um its started back when I was an alderman back in 2001, 2002 would have been about the start of the first buildings. The first buildings went all the way up on the other side of 111, so the Gile Warehouse was on the other side of 111 and then later uh in my first or my second term as alderman we annexed all of other side of 55, Interstate 55, where Hortica moved their offices out to. So, the City of Edwardsville, we like to say is wider from West to East than the city of St. Louis. You know, and we're not really encumbered to the North. We have our neighbors Glen Carbon to the South, and um, Pontoon Beach and, and Granite to the South but, to the North, you know, next up is Hamel. So, it's pretty neat to be that wide and be able to go that far north. I think I kind of touched on that earlier in the discussion, it would awesome to come back in 30 to 40 years and see what other mayors and other aldermen have been able to do with the community because um there doesn't seem to be many limits. [chuckle] (55:19)

SH: Yeah, that's great. Well um, is there anything else that you, you'd, you'd like to say or that we haven't quite covered? (55:27)

HP: In just real quickly um, as you asked when I started in, off as being alderman there were, there were three really influential people and I have talked quite a bit about about Gary Nieber being the mayor and the YMCA director. Um, Dr. Ed Hightower, um being the superintendent of schools had a major influence, he was also a, a trustee at SIU Edwardsville. And um, the, the third one I mentioned the transit district, Madison County Transit, Jerry King has been the director there. Um, having seen those three wise men over the years has been, uh very, um, very much, uh, mentors to me. And just, uh idealist that, very strong-willed, you know, they were individuals that you didn't want to get into a dog fight with 'cause they, they typically fought hard. But their passion about the things that they served for, you know,

whether it be the city, the school district, or the transit district, um was so strong that those three entities have been very, very successful. So it was, it was great for me to sit back and, and watch. It be a small part of their leadership, um but learn from them. So, yeah I would like, you know, people listening to this someday to if, if you don't get to hear from them directly, know that they were three pretty big players that made a difference either in our bike trails, in our bus transportation system which provides the employees that work at those 6200 jobs, or, you know, as I have mentioned number times, the importance of education um and uh Dr. Hightower made a huge influence there. So it's, it's been fun to, to watch those individuals and um and in many ways stay out of their crosshairs (laughing). (57:20)

SH: Well thank you, Hal, I appreciate you, your talking with us. That, that was very interesting, um talking about the, uh um, how the, how the political system works I think is, is fascinating.

That also its just, it's so interesting how the a, how Edwardsville has, has changed in the last part of the 20th century. And you started out contrasting uh what's happened say in East St. Louis or uh Granite City with, with the collapse of industry and the loss of jobs and what happens to those towns.57:57 And I guess in some ways the same happened to Alton, yet our, our history has been so much different, you know, um I guess it's because we weren't dependent on the industry. (58:15)

HP: Exactly, yeah diversification is very important. You have to have a diversified tax base and diversified opportunities that's why the warehouse district plays well, so does the corporate center which we are trying to develop, so does our retail and, and restaurant business. Um, I know there is a lot of grow occurring right not in Shiloh and in O'Fallon, but those, that's two communities that are certainly dependent on the base. If anything were ever happen to the Air Force Base, heaven forbid, that would be devastating for them. So, um the other thing that I think those communities, uh because I have talked with some of the past mayors from Granite, I have talked with the, but during the good years you gotta spend money on your infrastructure. You've gotta fix up your old streets, you've gotta make sure your older neighborhoods are as important as your newer neighborhoods. And so I, I think some of the lessons that I've heard that we, we do a good job here. You know the, the adage that you are only as strong as your weakest link, you know, we don't like to have weak links and so ... (59:16)

SH: Yeah, well I mean I think that is a good point. That,that during your good years you need to, to reinvest.59:14 Um I have heard that, uh, property taxes in East St. Louis are some of the highest in the state...

HP: Umm hmm

SH: ...and yet they don't, it, they're so far behind...

HP: Yeah.

SH: ...because of the infrastructure. The, the bureaucracy, the school system and everything that they have to, the, the few homeowners that are there have to spend huge amounts of their income on property taxes just to try and tread water ... (59:48)

HP: Right, yeah we, we get as much every year out of property taxes as we do out of sales tax. So having people shop here and visit here, um, that's super important for us to keep the property taxes down. Um

which makes us, you know, more attractive on that rate, um, comparing us to any other community in the metro east really that our property tax rates are very low. The problem is our properties are valuable here and so when you have a valuable property, against even a low rate, you still pay a pretty decent amount in tax. But, I go back to that value and I haven't found somebody that, you know, said that's not worth, I pay 7,000 dollars a year on my home, for example, 5,000 of that goes to the school district. But last year I had two kids in the school district, 2,500 dollars a child to have them educated, protected, extracurricular, I mean, you pay a lot more in that in day care.

SH: Yeah, and, and, and, you know, I think people are, are proud of the Edwardsville school system, and um, the quality of education that, that our kids get. I think you're absolutely right that, that's really, really very important for any community towards, towards future growth.

HP: Yeah, yeah and now with the success that SIUE is having it's just it puts a smile on your face. Especially for somebody like you that had worked there for so many years. You've got to be proud of where the university is going. And it's always, it's always been very, I was interested in how controlled that growth was and how structured and just recently there's been some things that's pushed it outside of its normal safety and in the structure but I think in a positive way. I think, I think um you'll, we'll see an expansion of their, their sports eventually, um to me I think that will really raise the attention of the university. Shouldn't be the primary focus but if you look at the way these colleges have grown over the years, and uh, SIU has about the same enrollment as Notre Dame but Notre Dame has quite a bit more endowments [laughing]

SH: Yeah. Well, I, I, you know, and I think the relationship between the university and the town is, is, is just so important. And um, it hasn't always been good and at times it's just been, uh um, live and let live. You know, they just ignore each other.

HP: Yeah.

SH: The fact when, when the two can work together, uh and they, they're just mutually reinforcing it, it means so much to the university to be able to say that uh Edwardsville is one of the 50 safety-ist, 50 safety-ist, safest towns in the US for a college campus it is just really, really important...

HP: Yeah and I, I have mentioned this in the whole interview but you talk about relationships, um I get along real well with mayor Jack Stat. Just had a meeting with him earlier today and um getting along with your neighbors, you know, and not having uh any infighting or worry about which development goes where because um we all fall underneath the same school district and the same township. Um and I know that SIUE also feels strongly about their relationship with Glen Carbon and that's important, you know, because we are all right it and we're in it together.

SH: Well again thanks Hal for your time I, I really, really appreciate it.

HP: You bet, thank you.