

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

Jim Pennekamp Oral History Interview

Steve Hansen, Interviewer

October 24, 2018

Steve Hansen (SH): Okay, so we're on now. This is Steve Hansen, I'm talking with Jim Pennekamp, James Pennekamp, it's October the 24th 2018. So, Jim, uh just, just so we just have an easy conversation here, I want you to kind of tell us a little bit about where you were born, where you grew up, and your, your early life.

Jim Pennekamp (JP): Okay. So, I actually am from the East Coast. Not from around here. I'm a Jersey boy, alright, with an international flair, Okay? So, I was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey, in 1950. There were five kids in my family, I had an older brother and an older sister, a younger brother, a younger sister, so I'm the middle kid and lived in New Jersey 'til I was about thirteen years old. My dad was actually a scientist. His dad was a Missouri Synod Lutheran minister, alright. As,

SH: He was a Missouri senator?

JP: Missouri Synod Lutheran minister.

SH: Oh, Synod, Synod.

JP: As was my mother's father and they both were professors at a Lutheran seminary in Greensboro, North Carolina, that taught African-American young men to be ministers in the Lutheran Church. And this goes way back in time. Way back in time to a very segregated South. But the reason that's important, is because, the reason my parents were in college—right, was because they were children of pastors in the south. And they went to college for free because of that. So, my father became a scientist, he was a chemical engineer.

SH: Who did he work for?

JP: Exxon.

SH: Exxon, wow.

JP: But it was not Exxon first, it was NJ Labs. Right? Then it was Esso, then it was Humble [laughs] then it was Exxon. Okay? Anyway, by the time I was thirteen, he was working out of New York, right? We were in New Jersey, right, we had moved to Westfield. Commuter town, I mean I was a kid, right, so all this was going on. I joke with people, I said, "You know, I didn't know there was green space between cities until I went to summer camp at age eight." By the way, the name of the summer camp was "Way Wayonda." [laughs] That's the truth. It was a YMCA camp. Yeah, that was my first introduction to the country. So, at that point, he was transferred overseas, so I, when I was thirteen, and my family moved to Brussels, Belgium, alright? So, I actually went to the majority of I guess late middle school and high

school in Brussels, Belgium. Which is significant for me in that I was, you know, introduced to, I went to the international school in Brussels, Belgium, it's still there. It was a much humbler place when I went there because all the military kids, and Brussels, of course, was a, was a, um, a center, you know,

SH: And naval headquarters.

JP: Oh, absolutely.

SH: Yeah.

JP: And this was back in the Cold War days, so all the military folks were there. We all, and in fact, all English-speaking people, went to the same school. And so, we were, I was exposed to folks from all over the world, many different cultures.

SH: Right.

JP: So, I grew up at least in those formative years of high school through eleventh grade in a very different way, right. And ended up loving it. Really loving it. And then, you know, transferred back to the United States because of my father. Ah, and ended up in my senior year of high school at Westfield High School. [laughs] And, you know, ran into people I knew when I was, you know, when I was there four years earlier.

SH: That must have been a really rich experience for you, then.

JP: Oh absolutely. Absolute, and you know, it was, it was, in so many ways, okay. First of all, you're thirteen, so understand, I'm a kid, okay. As were, you know, the rest of my siblings and being uprooted from what you knew and taken over to a foreign country, was very difficult at first. But you're, as a kid, you're real resilient, and you get used to things, and all of a sudden you begin appreciating things, and so. Being in Europe at the time, you know, Europe, as a group of countries it's much smaller than the United States, okay? So, you get in your car and you drive for a couple hours, you're in a different country. You've traveled, you know this, alright. And when you do that, you get to experience civilizations that are thousands of years old, essentially. And my father was very keen on teaching us about history. So, when I was thirteen I climbed the Great Pyramid. I was in King Tut's tomb.

SH: Oh, my gosh. Wow.

JP: But you see, it's not that far. It's really not that far! So, a short airplane trip to Cairo. And hang out in Egypt for a while. Then you go to Greece, then you go to Rome, and then you go to Spain. You know, so you can do all these things on a vacation. Here, you know, you might go to New York City, might go to the Grand Canyon, or you might go to Yellowstone. Okay, it's the same thing. Only...it's ancient there, right. And I do think that in retrospect I appreciate it more now, but then it was simply, I was a kid. Right? And you're experiencing these things, and it was quite wonderful. You know, but all things must end. At four years, tax laws and other things kick in, I think, for foreign nationals and you can't stay after four years, you have to leave. And so we came back to the United States. And again, finished my senior year of high school at Westfield High School.

SH: Did you make good friends, ah, any, while you were over there in Brussels?

JP: It was transient. Because people were constantly coming and going, so, yeah. You know, what's interesting is with the advent of the internet and social media, like Facebook and other things, it's hilarious. So, do you want to become good friends with somebody that you knew when you were thirteen? You're now capable of doing that. [laughs] That's a real question. We were the best of friends back then, I'm not so sure about now. That's happening. That's absolutely happening now, yes.

SH: Interesting.

JP: Yeah, they were good friends. I'm not in touch with any of them at this point. But it was, it was transient. That was part of it, okay. Every year there was a new group that came and some of us had to leave. And that way, I think you learned to adjust, you learned to adapt, you become quite independent through the experience.

SH: I bet.

JP: So, coming back to the United States, and you know, going to a new school as a senior. To my classmates, the people that I met in my senior year, they thought that was horrific. They looked at me, they go, "How terrible that you have to, your senior year. Your senior year of high school! And you're new! How horrible!" And I'm going, like, "what's the big deal?" [laughs]. It really didn't affect me and I realize that that's just because you became very independent.

SH: Were there any adjustments you had to make,

JP: Coming back?

SH: Leaving Europe and coming back to the U.S.? Did things change enough that your, made your eyes pop?

JP: The one, the one thing I have to tell you half joking. At that time in Europe, when you traveled, okay, you still couldn't drink water in many, many places. When we traveled we always got sick. It was just the way it was. Um, and it's one of the reasons why they, they drank fermented beverages from the time they were little. And I'll never forget, you know, my first foray into a restaurant and I sat down and there was a, you know, a little kid. These are tiny children, four years old, you know, like, drinking beer. Which is, which is just that, you're sitting there and you're going, "is that right?" Or a Belgian doctor recommending to an American mother with a small baby who's not gaining weight, "You should give him some beer, that will help." It's a very common thing, you know, but in part it's simply this thing about fermented beverages are sterile, and you can drink them and not get sick. And that's why in a lot of places, you just drank beer and other things. So, you come back to the United States, of course, you can't do that [laughs].

SH: Right.

JP: Right

SH: So, what was the, let's see, you graduated from high school then in probably 1968?

JP: Ah, yes.

SH: What was the world like in the United States, then?

JP: Everything was new. To me. I mean, new, modern. [laughs]. All of that history was very much gone. It was very trendy and very cliquish and just, and different. But I was, you know, I was a kid. Again, it's high school, you fall into it. The sports are different, over there it's soccer, here was football. You know. So.

SH: Yeah, yeah.

JP: I mean, but you're a kid, so you just, you get into a group, I got a girlfriend [laughs], you know. You just do it, right. But I was only there for a year. And then I was off. I went to, you know, undergraduate school, I didn't go to graduate school, but I went to Valparaiso University. Why?

SH: Why?

JP: Lutheran school. All my siblings went to Valparaiso except an older brother.

SH: Was it, was that, well, since all your siblings went there, wasn't so much of a cultural shock for you to go to northern Indiana, then.

JP: I will tell you this. Once again, I thought it was perfectly okay to get on an airplane with a steamer trunk and fly to Chicago O'Hare and find my way to Valparaiso. And that was the way I went to college. Everybody else arrived with their parents. [laughs] Um, again, it was, you know, it was fine, it was fine. It was, Chicago was fine. When I got to Valparaiso, it was a little bit of a culture shock.

SH: As a pretty small, pretty rural...

JP: [coughs] Yeah, it was. It really, at that time it was. I think it's very different now. At the time it was, yeah, it was a pretty small city, yeah.

SH: You know, that's a little bit of irony here, is I almost went to Valpo.

JP: Oh, is that right?

SH: Yeah. I, I did my college visit there and looked at it carefully.

JP: It's a good school. And it worked, and actually I ended up loving it. I kind of moved away from the whole cosmopolitan, East Coast, in-your-face kind of New Jersey attitude and embraced the Midwest. So, you know, Valparaiso, studied and ended up with a degree in sociology, minor in speech and drama. Of the two, what became most useful in my career, little bit of both, actually.

SH: What did you think you wanted to do when you,

JP: I knew what I wanted to do. I was very service-oriented. And when I left Valparaiso, I was looking for a career in dealing with young people, alright, in a service capacity. And I wasn't quite sure where that opportunity was going to arise, but I really liked the idea of doing that. And, you know, come on, I went to school in 1968, so. The atmosphere then, about, you know, what you should do with your life, right? And what was important, okay? Had a great influence on career choices and what I wanted to do. I was not interested in the corporate ladder at all.

SH: When you were in college, were you involved in any of the anti-war movement, or?

JP: Who wasn't? Who wasn't? How could you, I mean, that was what it was. If you were, first of all, if you were in college during those years, right, you were very much aware of the draft. Okay, and the war in Vietnam. And you had to have an opinion. On college campuses at that time, there's a raging debate going on, right? No matter what side of that debate you were on, you were in the debate, okay. You were. I was part of the first lottery, right? Part of the first lottery. And I can remember, you know, sitting in the student union when, when over the campus radio station, they were announcing the numbers as they came down, you know, there were people standing up, your birthday, number one, people stand up, salute, and go "and I'm enlisting!" That's it, you know, I'm going to enlist, and see if I can't get into the Guard or whatever.

SH: You remember what your number was?

JP: Sure. One-oh-five.

SH: Whoa!

JP: Yeah, I know. And I graduated in 1972, okay, and that was when they were de-escalating, okay. My draft board was in New Jersey, they were de-escalating the war, and they went up to one-oh-three.

SH: Oh, my.

JP: Yeah. But I was, I was, you know, I was pretty, pretty sure, leading up to 1972 that my number was going to get called. It didn't. And that was because of a political situation, right, where, oh it was Nixon was in the White House, had to do something because it was such an unpopular war at the time.

SH: Yeah.

JP: So, he was de-escalating and they didn't call up the numbers. And it had to do with where my draft board was.

SH: Right.

JP: Right, so. I mean, it just, you know. Things conspired to keep me out of...

SH: Did you, so you were in Valparaiso when the Democratic convention in '68 in Chicago.

JP: I was, I was,

SH: Did-did you,

JP: I was not there yet.

SH: Oh, okay.

JP: I was not there yet.

SH: Not there yet.

JP: I watched it on television. I was at the Jersey Shore watching it on television.

SH: [laughs] Okay.

JP: And people were saying, "Why are those people there?" I remember watching them and I was fascinated by them. I'm thinking, "Why don't they go home?" Yeah. I came, I come from...My family used...I'll say it this way. The majority, all of my family was Republican at the time. You know, they used to be Republican. There're some defectors. [laughs] Most of them are defectors now, but that was their background at the time.

SH: Then what did they think about you being involved in anti-war activities?

JP: Um...

SH: On campus?

JP: Well...

SH: And did you, did you do any marching or sitting in?

JP: I was at the November 15th moratorium on Vietnam in Washington, in Washington, D.C., yes. Yes. Did I... was I a radical? No, no. I was a college student. And I was exercising my free speech rights. But doing it within the confines of the law.

SH: Did the Valparaiso charter a bus for...

JP: No, no, no.

SH: ...kids to go? How did you get there?

JP: No. We were in a group of people, got together, there was someone who had a, who had a, at this point, I think it was an old Dodge van or something. And we went. So, we got there by ourselves, yeah.

SH: And was that a great experience?

JP: It was, it was, yeah. It was empowering for us. But again, it wasn't, we did not get gassed, we did not try to break through any lines. We were with, we were with people of all ages, okay? We were orderly, right, and we were there to protest peacefully. We weren't part of the weatherman or the SDS.

SH: In the crowd, yeah.

JP: Or any of that, yeah. You know, that wasn't our schtick. Um, but exercising our free speech rights? Yes.

SH: So after the, ah, after you graduated, then, what, tell me about your career trajectory.

JP: Oh. Okay, so was married in college, okay. When I was twenty years old, right. So been married a long time. Anyway. But my wife's parents were in St. Louis at the time, okay. And, again, having moved, right? There wasn't a place for me, I didn't have a hometown, some place to go back to and so we decided St. Louis was fine, right, so we came to St. Louis. We were interested in not living in the city, okay. Ah, and some people thought Jefferson County at the time was kind of nice and pastoral. So, it was this notion of living in the country. Which was nice. We rented an old farmhouse on a hundred acres from a Washington University professor. He was a physicist. [laughs]. And, so we moved to the country, blew up the TV, right, and I set about the objective of finding gainful employment in Jefferson County, right. Which was a bit of a struggle, to tell you the truth. I'll say there was a lot of odd-jobbing around. But eventually ended up doing what I had set out to do. And that was working with young people in the context of the Jefferson County juvenile court. Okay, so, I became a deputy juvenile officer, right? And worked for the twenty-third judicial circuit. We were more child advocates, okay? We intervened and we advocated on behalf of young people trying desperately to keep them out of the system. And it, you know, it's cliché, but the fact is, once young people get into the system, right, it's very difficult to get them back on the straight and narrow, so. I did that for several years. We did, my wife and I did a stint within the court system of running the Jefferson County children's home, which was a cross between a residential placement for abused and neglect kids and incorrigible kids and just basically wards of the court. We worked twenty-four-seven for fourteen days in a row and then got two days off. You talk about committed people.

SH: Yeah.

JP: We were, yeah. So, we did that for a while. I then went back to juvenile court work because that was not sustainable. [laughs] And I don't remember quite how long we did that, but it was several years in the juvenile court system. And then looked for a change, looked for a change. And had been working with...

SH: Was, was it hard, working in the juvenile court system, and did it kind of tear at your heart?

JP: Of course, of course. It was messed up, because you're seeing, you know, the kids who are, who fall into this incorrigible kind of category, and they get into all kinds of trouble. And you try to deal with them as best you can, putting Band-Aids all over the place. There's all of the abuse and neglect that you see, which is very difficult to deal with. Um, and I used to tell people that in the context of dealing with the juvenile court, you figure out how to get the court to actually do what you think is right for the kid. But many times, you have, you get the court to do it, but it's not really the right reason. There's kind of ways you can get things done, but it's a cumbersome process is my point. And although you're trying to, I

always saw myself as an advocate for the child, okay, rather than, rather than becoming adversarial or, you know, prosecutorial. Sometimes that happens. You know, at which point I figured everybody lost. So, you can do it for so long, right.

SH: Do you have any, yeah, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you. Can you only do this for so long before you're burned out, or?

JP: Yeah. Before it, before I got burned out on it, yes. And I thought...and other things happened. It's not very...rewarding financially, let's put it that way. See, you can do it for a while, but if you aspire to accumulate any financial gain, it's not, it's really not there. Anyway.

SH: Were there any cases that you can remember now that just really stick out in your mind that kind of illustrates the toughness of the job?

JP: We had...I can tell you we had, we had situations, um, where two brothers who had been adopted ended up murdering their parents. That was the most extreme case that we had.

SH: Their, their,

JP: Their adoptive parents.

SH: Their adoptive parents.

JP: Yes. So, these were brothers who had been in our charge and we were take, we were running this Jefferson County children's home. And they would, periodically, show up because there were problems in the home. And one day, they showed up and it was because they had murdered their parents.

SH: Wow.

JP: We had, we had other children in the home including a young baby under a year old who had, who had been taken by the division of children and family services. This was an open setting.

SH: Wow.

JP: This goes way back. Goes way, way, this was a long time ago. And so.

SH: Nothing happened.

JP: You dealt with it if it did. The level of tension you experienced under these circumstances.

SH: Yeah.

JP: Is difficult to describe. And we knew these, we knew these two young guys extremely well, right? And I, it was hard to fathom what they had done. Um, I want to tell you, I considered at the time I always thought that if any, if any of my charges actually got sent to, at the time, a place called Poplar Bluff, or "Booneville," I don't even know if those places exist anymore, that I had failed. If we had to send them away, right, then I had failed. That's the way I looked at the situation. So again, we were trying to get

them straightened out, back home, so they could go on with their lives. But this was a very long time ago. It was, it was challenging. I have great respect for people that can do this for their entire career. I wasn't willing to do it.

SH: Yeah, I would think that you'd have to either get very, very tough, or very numb to it,

JP: Yeah.

SH: Because it's emotionally just got to be so draining.

JP: Absolutely. Absolutely. Anyway.

SH: So, so from there, then...

JP: So then, um, interestingly enough I,

SH: Now, this was in the '70s, you were in Jefferson?

JP: Um, Jefferson County, Jefferson County. Let's see, I did write some of this stuff down so we could...ah, from '73 to '78. Okay. That was the time frame. And then, um, from '79 to '83, I worked for the Jefferson County Economic Development Corporation, so there was a transition that went on. Again, it was Jefferson County government, and I was able to make this transition, because the county was starting to embrace the notion of, "Hey, we need to get in the game." You know. "Our county's experiencing some dramatic growth, you know, we need to support the population, we're exporting all our work force to St. Louis, we need businesses to support county services and city services." And they were just starting, they were just starting with the Jefferson County Economic Development Corporation. So, I was fortunate and I became the assistant director of that organization. They had also established a port authority. Jefferson County borders the Mississippi River. And they were going through the motions of establishing it for future development. So, I worked there. And essentially became familiar with some of the economic development tools, grants, and other things that would serve me pretty well as I kind of made the transition and climbed the Economic Development ladder. I also met some people from Illinois through the basic economic development training courses. That's where I met Koepke, too, at the University of Illinois Allerton House. Because the basic economic development program was done by the University of Illinois at Allerton on this beautiful estate property which was set up like an English manor. It was an English manor house, manicured garden, it was a beautiful place that was, you know, part of the University of Illinois, alright? Land grant university, what can I say? Gorgeous place. Ah, but, Dr. Koepke was one of the professors and,

SH: That's Robert Koepke.

JP: Yeah, Robert Koepke of SIUE!

SH: SIUE. Okay.

JP: Who was, um, and his name will pop up throughout this, because he was one of the national leaders, right, in economic development at the time. And when he, you know, he would basically, he was one of

the presenters. And he was presenting the kind of documentation that you needed in order to present your community in the right light to site location consultants, prospects, and other people. Anyway, my first introduction to southwestern Illinois, SIUE was through the basic economic course when I was in Jefferson County, okay. And that connection, that was the connection that actually led to my becoming employed in southwestern Illinois, alright. Because my first job in southwestern Illinois was with the Tri-Cities Area Chamber of Commerce. Well, it's now called the Southwest Madison County Chamber of Commerce.

SH: And what are the tri-cities?

JP: Ah, Granite City, Madison, and Venice. Yeah. Anyway. I lived in Granite City. So, my first job in Illinois was working for the Chamber of Commerce.

SH: Now what, when you were in Jefferson, Jefferson County,

JP: Yeah.

SH: What was your relationship to the, uh, Regional Commerce and Growth,

JP: Yeah, RCGA.

SH: RCGA.

JP: St. Louis Regional Chamber of Growth Association.

SH: Now that, that's, is that...

JP: That's a key part of this story, by the way.

SH: Okay. Does the RCGA, is that the equivalent of the Chamber of Commerce of St. Louis?

JP: Yes.

SH: Okay.

JP: Yeah, the name changes periodically, of that organization. And the best I can tell it has to do with whether or not the chambers of commerce are in favor or not, okay. And I don't say that lightly, because I mean, it's not necessarily in vogue as much as it is about the focus of the group. But the RCGA was put together to market the St. Louis region, okay, that region encompasses the St. Louis metropolitan statistical area, which includes counties in Illinois and Missouri. So, Jefferson County was one of the Missouri counties. And yes, as an economic development organization in Jefferson County, Missouri, you know, I was interacting with that organization. There was another connection there, because one of the economic development professionals working with the RCGA at the time was a guy named Alan Richardson. Alan Richardson ended up at, as the executive director of the Tri-Cities Area Chamber of Commerce. Right? And his leaving that Chamber of Commerce to go work for one of the utility companies in Illinois opened up that position. It was that position that I applied for. Okay?

SH: Okay.

JP: So that position opened up, I applied for it. Based upon the connections I had made at that basic economic development course, right, and, I mean, I was nobody. No one in Granite City or Illinois knew who I was.

SH: And, when, when was this?

JP: I simply, I simply, well, it was in, it was...

SH: '83?

JP: Yeah, it was '83. I simply applied for the job, I guess they liked my resume, Alan Richardson, they did like Alan Richardson, I knew Alan Richardson, um, he did recommend me to them, okay, so I, that's probably what it was, actually, they liked Alan and Alan recommended me. And by hook or by crook, I got the job.

SH: In eight, alright. I got a bunch of questions.

JP: Okay.

SH: So, in '83, was, uh, steel and refinery and all that still going great guns?

JP: No.

SH: It was already on the decline?

JP: It was, it was awful. During this period of time, the late '70s early '80s was when globalization was being felt, okay. Globalization in the context of the Japanese miracle, okay. Basically, eating everybody's lunch. American industry had become non-competitive in many, many ways. Plants were old. The relationship between labor and management, was still adversarial. A. O. Smith, for instance, which was an auto parts manufacturer, had left Granite City. And what I was told was that they had left Granite City because of the relationship, an impossible relationship between labor and management. Some of the workers at A. O. Smith had told me that the, it was the union representatives who would not let the actual rank and file vote on a contract. Now, whether or not this was true, this is what I was told. That there was, even within the labor ranks, there was disagreement on what should have happened. But it gave management an opening to basically walk away from the plant. And the plant wasn't modernized, right. National Steel, was not doing well. So American industry was old and tired at this time and non-competitive globally. Something had to be done.

SH: So, so the effects were starting to be felt when you became,

JP: Oh, absolutely.

SH: , the director of the...

JP: Absolutely.

SH: ...of the Tri-Cities Development.

JP: Absolutely. Unemployment was high.

SH: Right.

JP: What happened? This is when Nippon-Kokan, the Japanese steel manufacturer, decided that they were going to buy fifty-one percent of National Steel Corporation. Right? Of course, the facility in Granite City was National Steel. So that gave National Steel life. Nippon-Kokan came in and began investing, okay. And you know bought time. So, I think that's when investments and things like continuous casters and more modern steel-making equipment began, right? I believe that's true. But the fact is that without foreign investment, in this case Nippon-Kokan, the future of that steel mill and National Steel was very much in question. Um, things got better. Things got better. While I was there Tower Automotive came in and reopened the old A. O. Smith plant. Caufield Equipment came in, which was a pickling operation. Heidtman Steel came in, which was a metal coating operation. So, things picked up again. Industry picked up. And it was...a lot of it came off of the steel mill, right. So, things...it was an ebb and flow, what was going on. So industry was very much down and then came back, right? And so, since I've been in Granite City, I've seen this cycle repeat itself. The last time, of course, when they closed, you know, the question was, what was going to happen to the steel industry in general in the United States, in America? U.S. Steel ended up buying the assets, right, and it kept the plant open. Then closed the plant again. Trump shows up, tariffs raised, other things happen, US Steel opens the plant up again. I mean, we've seen up and down, up and down, up and down in Granite City over time. Anyway, so the stay in Granite City with the Tri-Cities Area Chamber of Commerce, which is again the southwest Madison County Chamber of Commerce it was interesting. And, and there was a lot of success in industries coming back to that community, during that period of time. NESCO Steel Barrel was an interesting one, that was an employee buyout. And that started happening back then. Right? Companies were saying, "Now, we don't want this asset," and employees were saying, "Yeah, but, but we want an engineer buyout, an employee-owned company." Which was very interesting. And that happened during that time. Then, I got another job. Which was with the Riverbend Growth Association, at the time, it was, let's see, Greater Alton Twin Rivers Growth Association. You remember that one? Maybe not.

SH: No.

JP: What was happening, it was the northern part of Madison County, it was the Greater Alton Chamber of Commerce and there was the Twin Rivers Chamber of Commerce. And my understanding was that many of the larger corporations were members of both of those organizations. And while the economy was good, that wasn't a problem. But things were getting tighter, and life changes, and those decision-makers were saying, you know, "This isn't making a lot of sense anymore." And, "We don't see the reason for both of these organizations to exist. In addition to that, there ought to be more cooperation among the communities and other interested parties here. What we really need is a focused economic development initiative for the northern part of Madison County." So. Some of the leaders up there, Jack Jacoby, Jack Helmkamp, I'm going to...I'll just leave it at that. Those folks I remember. Got together with, at that point, some of the cities, leaders of the individual cities, and crafted something that they called the Greater Alton Twin Rivers Growth Association. And they said, "Okay, we're going to have one organization, and all of these other organizations are part of this one organization. This is the way we're

going to do it from now on." And they needed someone to run that. I wasn't interested. It's the truth. I was doing fine in the Tri-Cities Area. One of the things I had done in the Tri-Cities Area at the time was this notion of "we can probably do better if we're all working together." And what I was meant by that was, that we really need to build some trust among communities, among business, among labor, and are there projects that we can do? Is there something that we can do? Is there something that business and labor can do together besides sit across from each other at a negotiating table, you know, forget that. Is there something we can do together that will benefit everybody here? And that way we'll get to know each other, and maybe that will help. Right? Anyway, so I'd been talking like this. Maybe I had, maybe somebody thought I had a good idea. In any case, they had done a series of interviews for the job up at the northern part of the county. They actually hired somebody from Mattoon. I can't remember the gentleman's name. He accepted the position. And then he came down and visited, and then he went back to Mattoon, and he said, "I don't want the job." I got a call, I think for Ron Winkler, who worked for Union Electric. Had an office up in Alton. And he said, "Jim, are" he said, "Would you be at all interested in this job?" And I said, "You know, it's a real compliment that you're calling me," I said, "I didn't, you know I didn't, I didn't apply for it." I said, "But you're calling me," I said, "and least I can do is talk to you." And I said, "Sure, let's talk." So, I went up and I interviewed for that job. It sounded really interesting to me, they were very committed, I don't remember who was in the interview, there were some bankers and they seemed very committed to trying to make this thing work. It was very consistent with what I thought needed to happen in communities to be successful. And what I believe is people need to communicate, they need to build trust and respect, that's the only way you're ever going to get anything to work.

SH: What were some of the challenges, unique challenges they were facing up in Riverbend?

JP: Oh, Okay, why is there an East Alton and an Alton? Why is there a West Alton? Okay? Why do these people not like each other and why do they think that Madison County is out to get them? Okay? I'm being really honest with you.

SH: Yeah.

JP: There are so many divides, okay.

SH: Political...

JP: Yeah. Oh.

SH: Civil.

JP: There's just absolutely...trust is such a precious commodity. And there's, there's so much history, right, and so many things have been done, okay, to you, or you've done to them, or things have gone wrong, um, there's so little to go around.

SH: Okay, so, as the economy was, was depressing or was...

JP: Well. It's...

SH: Was getting, was weakening, that made people more,

JP: Yeah, we can talk the, we can talk the politics of scarcity, okay.

SH: Okay.

JP: That's certainly something that we see, now, we see continually. What I'm talking about is, I'm not from here. So, there is the, I do have some deficit. I can't tell you what the history of these communities is going way back. But what I can tell you is that there was a lack of trust. Alright? And so there was, the notion that our best effort would be to work together was not something that came naturally there. I don't think that does come naturally to people, by the way. So, you know, there's a real independence streak here. People have described southwestern Illinois as, you know, suffering from, you know, Balkanization, right?

SH: Yeah.

JP: They're very much separate. The Bluffs don't like the Bottoms, the Bottoms don't like the Bluff. In Madison County, I heard a new one. Above the canal, below the canal. I never knew that existed, right. But these are hard divisions that make, make it difficult, alright. So, what I'm saying is that, that these are the obstacles, right, that need to be overcome in order to get people to coalesce and come together to focus on issues which can help them individually, and the larger area together. And there are ways to do that, and there's things that actually have, that get them to do that. And one of the best examples of that in terms of the, what became the Riverbend Growth Association, the best example that I know is this Clark Bridge project. Right? So, you had a sixty-five-year-old bridge across the Mississippi River. That was well past its useful life. And it really needed to be replaced. Okay. And the only way that was going to happen was if you got the state of Illinois to determine, IDOT to say it was a priority, right, and to score it as such. And you're going to get a significant federal appropriation. Right? That doesn't happen, if you have one or two people, or a community that says, "We need this." It only happens if you get a coalition working together, right? You get all the local elected leadership, all of the labor people, all of the business people, all the grassroots constituents, to say, "This is what we need." And you go to your elected state leadership saying, "This is what we need." And you go to your federal elected leadership, you say, "This is what we need." And if you can get that done, if you can put all that together,

SH: So,

JP: Then you have a chance, just a chance of being successful. And you know what we did? You know what we did? We put it together. And we were successful.

SH: So, so you're, you're, it was your job, then, to put all these elements together and provide a united front.

JP: Absolutely. That's always the job. That was, that is the only job. That is the only job for an association. Absolutely, absolutely. It is to create the focus, well, it's to work with people to discover what that focus is. You know, folks used to come to me during my career, I mean, executive directors, "What should I work on? What should I do?" If I was in a mood, I'd say, "Pick something. Pick something, anything." Meaning...

SH: Yeah.

JP: Don't do everything, pick something. But beyond that, it's, what is it that your constituents agree upon? Okay? Because that's the only thing that's going to make you successful. So, when, when we talk about, when we talk about, and let's, so let's segue into the leadership council, okay. Because, you know,

SH: Okay, so what, what's the dates of Riverbend, then? Eighty...

JP: Ah, Riverbend, okay, well, the, uh, yeah, '85 to '89.

SH: Okay.

JP: And then in '89, '89 to 2006, leadership council was a long ride.

SH: Okay.

JP: That was a long time.

SH: Now, how did you get the leadership council, then?

JP: Well. [sighs] That was interesting.

SH: Okay, back up. The, so while you were at the Riverbend Growth Association, that, that was, um, the Clark Bridge project, which was the big...

JP: Of all the things that we did, yeah, that's the one that stands out in my mind.

SH: Did the casinos come in later?

JP: Yes.

SH: Okay.

JP: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

SH: What other economic development projects did you try and get them to focus on, uh, while you were at the, at Riverbend?

JP: Oh. Well, a lot of what you do, a lot of what you do is create the atmosphere which is attractive to businesses, okay. So, one of the things that was necessary there, and certainly appropriate, was to work with the communities to create the Riverbend Enterprise Zone. Right? Now, you know what an enterprise zone is.

SH: It's like,

JP: Okay, an enterprise zone is a specific geographic area within which a business that wants to build, make improvements in this case, like a building, right, gets certain tax advantages. And what they are is the abatement of sales taxes on the construction materials that would go into a new structure and a certain

number of years property tax abatements, you know, on the improvements, which would be the building. There are some other things that they can apply for, if the project is big enough. For instance, there can be some utility tax abatements and other things. And I don't know what of those incentives may change since I've been out of the loop on this stuff, but those are some pretty attractive incentives. You can also take a tax increment financing district, and layer over the top of an enterprise zone, and you can extend some of the benefits. So, they're pretty powerful incentives. The area, alright, because it had suffered some pretty significant losses of industry, particularly in an area known as the "Broadway Corridor," in Alton coming down through the Route 3 area along the river, was prime for an enterprise zone. To help both existing industries and perhaps redevelop some of that area. And so, we worked on putting those kinds of things in place.

SH: So, you had to obviously be involved a lot with, with politicians,

JP: Yeah.

SH: And, and the political system. Was that, was that hard, difficult, uh, did, were those supportive?

JP: Was it hard?

SH: Yeah. I mean, I, I obviously don't know.

JP: It's part of the job. Yeah, no. Well. It's, it depends. [laughs]

SH: On the individual? Or...

JP: It depends on many things. I wouldn't characterize it as "hard," I never saw it as, I saw it as an absolutely essential part of the formula. Okay? Here's the formula for success. Getting government, business, labor, and education to work together by doing their jobs effectively. Okay? That's success. Right? Is that hard? Yeah. Right, yeah. That's hard. But that's what you do. And if you can't do that, then you won't be successful.

SH: Were there any politicians that stand out in your mind that were really effective?

JP: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I'll tell you, Jim McPike was extremely, extremely powerful.

SH: What position,

JP: Well, he was a representative.

SH: State representative.

JP: For the Alton area. Extremely effective, okay. And frankly, you didn't want to do anything without informing Jim McPike. Okay? Um, and I, and I was the recipient of, of his...how can I explain this? Recipient of mistakes I made, alright? And recipient of good things I did. So compliments and reprimands, right. Yeah. But, you know, it was, it was always my job, right, to do my best, to try to keep those representatives from government, business, labor, and education, as informed as I could, alright, about what we were trying to do. And to ask them, right, to do what I thought was necessary. And, you

know, sometimes, sometimes I was great, sometimes messed up. So, you know, yeah. It was just the way it was. Was it hard? Sometimes. Sometimes not hard. But you, you always try to, always try to do the best you can. And I actually, actually I think I was pretty good at it. I think we got a lot done together.

SH: And how did you get to leadership council, then?

JP: Ah, okay.

SH: Talked about that transition.

JP: So, I was,

SH: So that was in '89.

JP: Yeah. So, you know, so I thought we did pretty, I thought things were going well at the Riverbend Growth Association. And who was it? Was Mary Kane, Mary Kane was at the leadership council at the time. And was Mary Kane, was Mary Kane moving on to perhaps the Southwestern Illinois Development Authority? That must have been it. I think Mary Kane was moving on, and I was interested. I was interested in the leadership council as a next step. I don't know if anyone encouraged me to do it. But I thought I was certainly capable of it, of doing a good job there. And it made sense as a logical move. And so, I applied. And I guess they liked me. And I ended up there.

SH: And were the challenges at the leadership council...how were they different from the ones that you faced at Tri-Cities and Riverbend?

JP: Well, it was interesting. Because I ran into an organization that was transitioning. And I don't know if they were different, okay, but I can tell you this. The leadership council was set up to focus the region's economic development initiative. I mean, the leadership council came about literally because the RCGA under James O'Flynn, and this goes back decades and decades and decades and decades, okay, was at a ribbon-cutting in Granite City...I believe Heidtman Steel, I'm not sure. It was probably at the time, Illinois Powers Industrial Park on Route 3. So, Carl Matthias was there. Ralph Korte was there. I believe this story to be true. And Jim O'Flynn said to Carl Matthias and Ralph Korte, "The RCGA is supposed to represent these Illinois counties. But with the way things are now, there's no way the RCGA can do an adequate job. Because there's all these groups and stuff, nobody's working together, and, you know, something has to happen here to facilitate a relationship with the RCGA." Now, that rings true to me. I can certainly see that as a dilemma for the RCGA. There wasn't any focus here in southwestern Illinois. It's not even a criticism, it's fact, back then. So, and I can see Ralph Korte and Carl Matthias saying, you know, "We'd like to see something happen here." One's a utility company, Ralph's a builder. Wants to build things.

SH: Carl Matthias was with Ameren?

JP: Illinois Power.

SH: Illinois Power. Okay.

JP: Illinois Power. He was the vice president of Illinois Power. This was his territory. And I can see them wanting to facilitate something and they ended up going to SIUE and talking to Dr. Lazerson. Which makes perfect sense. Because at the time in southwestern Illinois, the university was very much the focal point for those discussions. For those kinds of regional discussions. You know, this is probably even before I was over here, right, because I remember hearing about this discussion when I first showed up at the Tri-Cities area. I was kind of in shock, because they were talking about, "Well, we don't need all these organizations, we just need this one," I was like, "well, wait, I just got here!" [laughs] "I just moved, wait a second!"

SH: "Don't eliminate my job!"

JP: Yeah, right, it's kind of doing this self-protection kind of thing. But it was interesting because, you know, as I grew to know southwestern Illinois, all of this made a lot of sense to me, So, Dr. Lazerson agreed to lead discussions about how this might work. What this really meant. Was it even possible? And he was the one, I believe, who thought that looking at the, really the political landscape in southwestern Illinois, that an organization like this would have to have labor, organized labor, as a component in order to work. I mean if you have an interface with government, state government, local government, county government, that's where this notion of, you know, business, industry, education, you know, labor, all of this came from. And so, I'll tell you, that notion was revolutionary at the time. That wasn't the way things worked, okay. These entities were separate. They didn't interact on that level at all, alright, so this was cutting edge stuff. And it remained cutting edge stuff for years. When I took over the leadership council, and I used to make that presentation, people'd look at me and they'd go, "Oh, well, wait a minute! How can organized labor be part of this organization?" Oh, you know, it works for us! And so, whereas I think initially the idea was, okay, well, this leadership council is going to attract all of these, going to go out and get businesses located in southwestern Illinois, alright, that over time the leadership council became an organization that could speak with one voice for southwestern Illinois. So, we're back to, okay, government, business, labor, education, industry. You know, the success is based upon these groups all doing what they do together. Right? The formula? So that formula kept working for southwestern Illinois. So, when, for instance, Governor Thompson had a "Build Illinois" Program? Right? These people could get together, confer with their people and we could say, you know, "That Build Illinois Program would be really helpful for southwestern Illinois in these ways." And that message would be delivered consistently. And guess what? You had a high likelihood of success in having those things done in southwestern Illinois.

SH: And what were some of those things?

JP: Oh, I think you, I think you would not have the success of I-255 for instance. Okay? A lot of these, these are capital programs.

SH: Right.

JP: So. So.

SH: So, I-255.

JP: I-255, okay, FAP Route 413 which was the continuation by 255. A lot of this stuff is going to be public works programs, okay, so it's infrastructure. So, look around at the roads, okay? Look around at, for instance, the Clark Bridge. The Stan Musial Veterans' Bridge. You have no idea how long that was worked on, okay? How long that was worked on.

SH: That you were working on back in the '90s.

JP: Oh, no. I was working, well, actually, I don't have a date on that. But when I made a presentation to your, one of your construction management programs, I pulled out the original memo. [laughs] The East-West Gateway Coordinating Council.

SH: Oh, yeah, I remember that.

JP: That one of the county board chairmen asked me to write. Demanding a study on a new Mississippi River bridge. So, but, but you see, what I'm saying is, you see that? He was on East-West Gateway, and he said, "We need a memo to come to us," so he could call me, because that was one of our priorities, right. So, this is the way things,

SH: So, what was the relationship between East-West Gateway Coordinating Council and leadership council?

JP: Oh, well I sure...we, our, the, it's a governmental entity, okay.

SH: Okay.

JP: You have the county board chairs who either appoint people or serve, okay.

SH: So East-West is a quasi-governmental...

JP: Ah, it's the metropolitan planning organization, so they have a great deal to do with federal money that comes to the area.

SH: Right.

JP: Okay, they approve the plan.

SH: Okay. Gotcha.

JP: Yeah. Is there, are there politics involved there? Of course, there are.

SH: Yeah.

JP: Here's the thing. How can you, how can you, be involved in these things together if you, if you're not connected with the people who are sitting on these boards?

SH: Right, right.

JP: How can, and what I mean by connect is talking to each other. Sitting down in meetings and saying, "Where are our interests best served? And how can we together get these things done and compete with Chicago?"

SH: So, what were some of the big projects while you were leadership council executive director then?

JP: Many, many... a lot of this, a lot of these projects, and again, stressing that there're many, many, many, many different entities involved in these things, okay, and, I saw the role of the leadership council trying to keep people informed and work with all of these people to get things done.

SH: So, the, the roads, Scott Air Force Base.

JP: Absolutely. The Scott Joint, what we used to call Scott Joint Use which became Mid-America Airport, which translated into, into eventually the retention at Scott Air Force Base, through the military base realignment enclosure process, which, you know, enveloped the leadership council during two rounds of, you know, BRAC which is the Base Realignment and Closure Initiative, so.

SH: Right. The levees? Levee system?

JP: The levees came up later, okay.

SH: Okay.

JP: That came up when I was at SIUE. [laughs]

SH: Alright.

JP: You know what my comment was then? I thought I was out of this business. [laughs] But yes. Yes. And I'll tell you this. I think that the Base Realignment Closure Initiative was, I think when that happened, because you can work on infrastructure projects, bridges and other things, and those things are important, right, but what do you do with that one? How does a region respond to that? Okay? And it struck me, what happened, because we knew nothing. There was a meeting that Congressman Costello at the time invited virtually all of the mayors, right, and county board members, the chairmen and others to this meeting. And he announced that, uh, this was I think in 1994, right, he announced that there was a, that they were going through this Base Realignment Enclosure Initiative, and that he had done a great deal of work on it, right, had done the work, but it was time for the community to respond. And I can tell you, I had no working knowledge of this process. And I don't think, I will bet you, I can't vouch for everybody, but I'm sure the communities had no real knowledge of this. And the question was, okay, it's time for us to respond. What does that mean? And how do we mobilize? What is it that we are supposed to do? And without the relationships that had been formed over years between government, business, labor, education, all of these people, the ability to trust each other, talk to each other, okay. To get out there and do what was necessary very, very quickly? We would not have been able to respond. And that's when a lot of people, I think, including myself, realized how valuable the leadership council was and how valuable those relationships were in our ability to do those things. And we did them. And we were immensely successful. Immensely successful. Both in '95 and then again in 2005. 2005 we not only stayed open, we gained new things at Scott Air Force Base. And I can tell you, I, you know, how do you

prove these things? I'm absolutely sure that the community's response...military's view of the community's response and support for Scott Air Force Base, among various other things, was part of that formula for success.

SH: Jim, besides, um, Carl Matthias and Ralph Korte and Earl Lazerson, who were some of the, uh, the main players over the decade and a half that you were executive director?

JP: Oh, people like Tom Holloway, Bruce Holland, Ron Capek

SH: Bruce Holland of Holland Construction?

JP: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Bruce is,

SH: Tom Holloway is Bank of Edwardsville.

JP: Bank of Edwardsville, yeah. Now retired. Um, you know, there were many. You know, I should have, those, you know. Who else?

SH: Who replaced Carl at Illinois Power when it became Ameren?

JP: Not sure. I think it, um, I think that was Ron Dane, as a matter of fact.

SH: That's alright.

JP: Yeah, I'm, I'm, you know.

SH: You've, when you came to, to cross the river, to Granite City back in the sev, late '70s, and now on up to moving into SIUE in 2006 the head of University Park.

JP: Yeah.

SH: You've, you've witnessed twenty-some-odd, thirty years of tremendous change in this area.

JP: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SH: Greater change than, than a number of other regions have experienced.

JP: Well, I'm not sure about that. I'm not sure, I don't have that comparison. I can tell you that, that, you know, I have...my view is of basically the St. Louis region. And I can tell you what I saw personally, okay? And you saw, too. I mean, you know, the enormous advances in technology, okay, which has disrupted every facet of life, okay, and business. Right, for better or for worse have driven everything. That's just, that's just a fact, okay. So that's been, that's the overall thing. That's the macro thing. That's what's done it.

SH: So, you're saying that that's what impacted the decline of the steel industry?

JP: That's impacted everything. Yes. And so, what you have,

SH: And obviously the rise of the warehouse districts on the flood plain.

JP: Absolutely. So, if you want, if you want to look at this, okay, you're moving from manufacturing to a service economy, okay. And so, manufacturing has changed dramatically. Look, when I came, U.S. Steel in Granite City had six thousand workers. They now have fifteen hundred workers at that plant. Largely through auto, we used to call it automation, we don't even call it that anymore. Right? It's all through technological advancements. Look. When I was at Valparaiso, I worked for U.S. Steel in Gary, Indiana, alright. Gary's right next to Valparaiso.

SH: Right, right.

JP: There were five, I think five steel mills. I believe, I want to say it, I want to say there were like fourteen thousand steel workers. We were like, we were like our own towns, okay. There wasn't anything automated. [laughs]

SH: Yeah.

JP: And so, that's in my lifetime. You asked me what changed. I worked in a steel mill. I saw this, okay. Everything is computer controlled now. Everything's computer controlled.

SH: So that, that effected industry, technology, and that therefore effected labor.

JP: Absolutely.

SH: And effected the way, where people lived, and how people lived.

JP: Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. And so, in southwestern Illinois, what you have seen is, in terms of where people live, right? People don't live where they work anymore, okay. So, what's happened is, you've seen this movement from the old industrial communities, many of which were right along the river, were on the river for transportation.

SH: So, they moved to places like Alton and Granite City, and...

JP: Sauget, yes! Yes. But they were there because of the river transportation, right? They're still there for the river transportation. That's all part of how they operate, right? But people don't, people who work in those plants today, don't have to live there, right?

SH: Right.

JP: And they made a choice. "Let's move away. Let's move up." And in our case, what happened was they want to live in the more suburban communities, in our case, in Madison County, it's like Troy, it's like Edwardsville, it's like Glen Carbon, okay? But it's this movement away. That's had dramatic effects. Dramatic effects. You could say, you could say positive? Although some would argue it, right, on the communities that are receiving the people, right. And deleterious effects on the older established communities. So. You know. Nobody would argue that, right, local population-wise.

SH: Not every community has survived the, the decline of industry.

JP: No. I mean, we have,

SH: Gary, Indiana, for example. Um, Granite City has suffered. Why, but overall, Madison County seems to have survived and even succeeded in a lot of, of ways.

JP: Well, it's interesting,

SH: Why, why is that?

JP: If you look into, well, if you look at Madison County, we have fewer population. In fact, we've had overall population decline. What's happened in Madison County? Madison County's held its own, let's put it that way, but don't think Madison County has grown. It has not. Okay? St. Clair County has fewer people, if I last looked at the population statistics. Let's just put it this way, neither one of these counties has experienced growth, right. However, areas within the county have experienced growth. Okay?

SH: So, change is experienced. Change, but not necessarily growth of the county.

JP: Yes. Yes, yes. There's been movement within the county, but if you look at the county as a whole, you're not seeing population growth, you're seeing growth of certain communities within the county, right? And, and Edwardsville-Glen Carbon, if you take those, or Troy, right. Edwardsville has some substantial growth. And I attribute that in large part to the University. Do you know what the second largest employer in southwestern Illinois is?

SH: SIUE.

JP: SIUE. Yeah.

SH: Right behind, um,

JP: Right behind Scott, yes.

SH: Air Force Base.

JP: Yes, yes. Those are both public entities. Yet when you see, it's not hard to, in my mind, anyway, to figure out why certain areas have done well, right. And that university brings an enormous advantage to a community. Both in terms of education levels, I mean, the statistics are out there for anyone that wants to look at them, okay. And good for us. Good for Madison County, to have SIUE, to have Edwardsville, and these other communities. The question is how do you address the issues in the communities that have lost population and that are struggling? That's the other part of the question that needs to be addressed.

SH: How do you address the growth and how do you address the decline.

JP: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. What does that mean? Because these things, we are connected, again. A lot of people don't look at it that way. I have always looked at it that way.

SH: When you, what prompted you to leave the leadership council in 2006 and come to work for the university?

JP: Come to the university? Ah, a moment of insanity. [laughs] Actually, I saw another logical transition. There were things that I was working on at the leadership council that seemed to kind of come to fruition. A lot, some infrastructure projects, there were things that were finished. You know, we'd come through another round of BRAC successfully, it was like, wow, things are good here, and you had a chancellor, alright, that I admired greatly. Vaughn Vandegrift, who wanted the university to gain a, to be known, to be an entity, alright? He wanted to put SIUE on the map. And there was kind of an excitement that he brought to the university. I don't know how folks internally were looking at Vaughn, but I know the community was looking at him, and saying, you know, "This guy wants to, he wants to promote the university, and we think the university needs to be promoted." I was looking at University Park, right, and I was thinking, knowledge-based economic development. We were all moving in that direction, there was this whole notion, you know, where is technology going, what does that mean in terms of business development, how do we marry those two things, how do we, how do we take the intellectual property, you know, as a resource in the most general sense at the university, how do we marry that with business and how do we become successful? Listen, you know, people don't remember this, but the first couple of years at University Park were amazingly successful. Yeah. We sold a building that had been sitting there empty, okay, to a private tenant. We filled, we filled a couple of buildings. I remember we put an article out that we had seven new tenants in University Park, things were going great, then the worst recession since the Great Depression. [laughs]

SH: Yeah.

JP: And, and how many years did we go without a budget? Oh, it was everything, just, oh. Gah. [laughs]

SH: I think that says it all, Jim.

JP: Oh, my gosh. I couldn't believe it. We were, we hit the rough patch, big time.

SH: Yeah.

JP: Nothing was happening. "Please don't leave! Please, tenants, don't leave!" [laughs] Life changed dramatically for every economic developer in the United States. It was terrible.

SH: Well, I appreciate you taking the time and, and doing this, this has really been very interesting and your, ah, being an active participant in all these changes has been, is interesting to learn about. I'm, I'm fascinated by the change that's occurred or why it's occurred. And, um, so your point of view is really, it's interesting. I've asked similar questions to Gary Niebur, and Ed Hightower, and Tom Holloway, and Ralph Korte, and some other folks, and they all have slightly different but also slightly similar answers about the factors that came together, that were responsible for the kind of positive change, or able to mitigate some of the bad changes that have occurred. And they all mention, uh, education, particularly SIUE, its presence and growth.

JP: Absolutely.

SH: They all mention, uh, the role of the leadership council in getting all these units that you talked about to cooperate and to focus, government, labor, business, education.

JP: I'm glad to hear that, yeah.

SH: Um, so it's interesting. Now, some of them are more enthusiastic in terms of seeing the, ah, the positive in growth. Because maybe they're sitting in the middle of it, as opposed to sitting down in Granite City,

JP: Oh, it's, no.

SH: Or up in Alton.

JP: Yeah. It's interesting. Where you stand depends on where you sit, okay, right? So, your view is, you see life through various lenses, okay, but I don't think people, unless you get out statistics and look at them, alright? You would be, you would have a different impression. I mean, the numbers don't lie, right. So, I have said that to various people, and they go, "What do you mean there's no growth?" Sorry, but there isn't.

SH: Yeah. Right.

JP: There isn't.

SH: I was, I looked at the census and I was stunned, too. I was really surprised.

JP: Yeah, yeah. And so, when you look at it, and you start thinking, and you start analyzing it's not surprising. It's not surprising. Guess what? It's not going to get better. I mean, frankly, you know, we're baby boomers. We're the bulge in the belly of the snake. Right? So, it's not going to get better. Birth rates are going down, right? There's going to be fewer of us. That's what's happening, it's a major demographic shift, okay. Something else. You mentioned the levee situation, okay. Which was astonishing. And I said that that did not occur when I was with the leadership council. It occurred after I had, you know, come on board with the university. After I had retired from SIUE, interestingly enough, um, I want to say Bi-State. Not called Bi-State anymore. What do they call it? The folks who run the MetroLink. Metro. Anyway. Used to be Bi-State Development Agency. Metro started an economic development course. But they were looking for a case study, and I got a call because I knew some people, or they knew me. And they were very taken with the levee project. Particularly how that project came about. Not the actual physical fixing of the levees, but how in the heck did three counties get together and come together to repair several federal levees? Literally generating millions and millions of dollars through a sales tax. That just doesn't, that just doesn't seem possible. And when you think about it, um, it wouldn't be, I don't think that would be possible today.

SH: Well, you know, it's interesting, that comparison is with when I was interim chancellor, is when leadership council and everyone was pushing hard for,

JP: The MetroLink?

SH: The National Geospatial Agency to come over,

JP: Okay, alright, got it.

SH: , to this side of the river. And the comment from, uh, Congressman Clay over in St. Louis was that he was so envious of the east side and its cooperation and its unity in pulling for the NGA.

JP: There it is. There it is.

SH: So, it's the same story as the levee.

JP: Yep, yep, yep.

SH: I think a lot of that is your legacy.

JP: Well, I will tell you, my point is that that was always something I was worried that we were losing, frankly. I had to step away from all of this stuff, for my own mental health, frankly. [laughs] You asked, you asked me what I've been doing, I haven't been doing this stuff. But I really wanted to step away from all this and take a break. So, I haven't been connected. And I see things, and I hear things, but I don't have a context to process it, okay? And I just didn't see a whole lot of unity going on. I saw a whole lot of divisiveness.

SH: Well, after the election in 2016, I think,

JP: Yeah.

SH: I think, you know, maybe your observations are correct. There's more local divisiveness than there was before.

JP: And it, and it bothers me. Because I think that's, how do you get anything done? Unless you can compromise, you can disagree on a lot of stuff, right? And that's fine, people disagree. But in order to get anything done, you have to agree.

SH: Right.

JP: Right? And so,

SH: As you said, yeah, to focus.

JP: Yeah. Exactly. Um, anyway. So, they wanted this case study, then. As I was preparing to talk about this, I was looking at it, and I was thinking, "man, this was, this was incredible." That we could get the state of Illinois to empower us. Three county boards, to declare an emergency, and institute a sales tax through an emergency, emergency vote of county boards. And the county boards were willing to do it. It's just, I mean, it needed to be done, it was the right thing to do, but how unusual that it would be done this way. Wow. Amazing.

SH: Yeah.

JP: Yeah. So. Good for us. [laughs]

SH: Again, thanks, Jim. I appreciate you giving me the time to do this, and, ah, if there's something that we failed to cover that you think of on your drive back to Granite City, send me an email, give me a call, and we'll just add it in.

JP: Okay. [laughs] Doubtful, but. You've got enough material here. If it makes any sense, I don't know.

SH: Well, we'll be sending you a transcript. And you can edit it as you see fit.

JP: Okay.

SH: And then once we have the approval on that, we will post the written and the oral.

JP: Okay.

SH: Okay.

JP: Good.