

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

Mary Kane Oral History Interview

Steve Hansen, Interviewer

St. Louis Bread Co., Edwardsville, Illinois

April 18, 2018

Editor's Note: The following transcript was edited by Mary Kane and may vary slightly from the original interview audio recording.

[Steve Hansen asked question that was not recorded]

Mary Kane (MK): So many dramatic changes. And it's hard to know which century incurred the most changes. But I can't imagine that this last century wasn't one of the most significant because, as you said, there were several wars and you had a total change in the demography of this era...

Steve Hansen (SH): Okay. You keep one and I keep one.

MK: Oh, alright, let me sign the other one.

SH: Alright just, for the record, today is the 18th of April 2018. We're sitting in a coffee shop in Edwardsville. Mary Kane is here to talk with me. I'm Steve Hansen and uh... um... we want to um, collect as much information as we can from you, Mary, and uh, have an easy conversation um... like I said, the students are going to transcribe this and send you a copy to edit and any way you want and it also you can add or you can delete. And then we will, once we have your approval, we will post this up on the archive and then it will be also searchable eventually. So someday say they want to know, say you mention Earl Lazerson's name or Ralph Korte's and somebody is wanting to do a biography on Ralph Korte and they'll, they can put in his name and the search will then take them to your interview.

MK: Oh!

SH: To your

MK: Okay wow... that's pretty amazing

SH: ... as well as other documents that we might have

MK: Okay, I guess there's no comparable verbal and/or written interviews because there would be none of the digital information or none of the transcription from previous centuries available say for example. So, if I wanted to look up information on the 1800s does the University have anything like that? Or do you go to the Madison County Historic Society?

SH: Uh, that's a good question. It's... it's evolving... uh... the Library of Congress in Washington

D.C. has a lot digitized and you can do online searching. Our library at SIUE you can do some... umm... uh and I know that the genealogists are really kind of in the vanguard of a lot of this in digitizing newspapers, particularly birth to death notices...

MK: Yes

SH: and census records so you want to look up... uh... the Kane family and and they can be automated

MK: That is amazing that you can do that.

SH: Yeah

MK: We went to the Madison County Historical Society about a year and a half ago, because of our son-in-law, Dan. His mother lived in Edwardsville when she was a little girl and his grandfather was involved in constructing the Shell's and the Conoco's, the big oil facilities that were in Wood River and he would drive back and forth to work. It was interesting to talk to Dan because he remembers her telling the family where they lived, what was across the street. Some of the houses and buildings are still there but some of course are gone. However, just to hear what they did back when they were building the refineries and how important they became to the region was fascinating.

SH: I bet it was. I know the uh, Shell Refinery has a massive uh... um... library that they've started building on... on the...

MK: Oh, is that right?

SH: ...on the refinery

MK: Good for them.

SH: ...we have had access to some of that stuff

MK: That's good

SH: Yeah

MK: They were a major player in this region. There is no question [laughter] about that

SH: So

MK: So, this pile of paper is for you. I'm giving it to you because it may help clarify what I say. To prepare for our interview, I went through copies of old newspaper articles and looked up the history. We are fortunate that there's a tremendous volume of information available. There are newspaper articles about projects completed in the last couple of years that I had forgotten about but which I think are really fascinating and some are excellent. They will relate information much better than I will be able to do so, quite honestly Steve. They talk about what went on, who were some of the principal "movers and shakers" and what they accomplished. That... that is a great article. I don't know if you've seen it but it is an excellent article, It highlights details that I was afraid I would forget [laughter]

SH: Oh well great, great

MK: That's important and particularly it includes the names of people that really made a difference

SH: This will be very helpful. Thank you. So why don't you just telling ... telling me a little bit about your background, where you grew up, educated

MK: Well, I have a resume in that collection of papers I gave to you and I'm going to use it because over time I forget [laughter] what happened and when. I was born in the 1940'; my father was in the war and my mother was a nurse in the war. After they got married, he served with the VA Hospital system. We lived in Maryland for a long time and then he decided it was time to move, so, we came to Illinois. In that era, doctors were reaching out to other doctors to join their practices and rebuild their lives after the war.

SH: Your father was a doctor? An MD?

MK: He was an MD. During the war he was shipped overseas, and I was born while he was overseas. [unintelligible] so [laughter] anyway then we moved here. We moved into East St. Louis at the time. It was our first home and then subsequently moved into Belleville and I went to high school in Belleville.

SH: You have any idea why they decided to move to East St. Louis? From Maryland?

MK: No, not really

SH: Oh

MK: He was a radiologist and was looking around for where he could best use his skills. Both mom and dad were from the East Coast, New Jersey and Rhode Island. So I do not know why they moved to the Midwest [laughter]. He was with that practice until he retired so obviously it worked out well. Remember, at that time East St. Louis was a growing city with a large industrial complex in and around its borders so many people moved or stayed here for employment following their service. East St Louis even received national recognition as a City of the Year. I can still remember the large sign outside the City announcing its award as City of the Year. It was just a large city.

SH: Vibrant...

MK: Vibrant, that is a good word! I went to high school at Notre Dame. It is not there any longer and then to Tulane University for my undergraduate studies.

SH: What, was it unusual for women to go to, uh, college...when did you go to college?

MK: No, not at all. I graduated in 1967.

SH: '67. Okay.

SH: And...what, what were you thinking you were going to do?

MK: Well, I really had no idea. At the time I knew I was obviously not a candidate to be a nurse or a

doctor, that was perfectly clear, so I looked around and then when I got to Tulane it was great because it was a very different environment than anything like a Catholic girls' school. [laughter]. From there I got my Master's degree at the University of Arizona in Urban and Regional Planning. I was there for two years. It was perfect because I really enjoy being part of a community and enjoy working with people. Also, by that time I'd had a sense of how cities grow, what do they do and how important are those people who are elected and those who become involved in organizations committed to improving the future of their region

SH: But yet, but yet you came back, came back here after you got your Master's...

MK: Yes, because I could not get a job that would pay me what I thought I should be paid anywhere else. [laughter] Nobody wanted me! It was horrible! I got a job offer for \$4,500 a year from California and I thought... no! [laughter] I'm not going to do that. I would say that was the one...downside of being a female in the profession. It was not until I started working for governmental entities that I was recognized as a professional who could do the job. The private sector wasn't as kind to women as it was to men in that era. I even had one of my private sector bosses tell me that really, I didn't need to earn much money because my husband Jerry had a job.

SH: Yeah.

MK: It's good to have those old-fashioned ideas eliminated. I was fortunate to become an employee of the Southwestern Illinois Metropolitan and Regional Planning Commission and then the year following a chance to participate in a summer program, that was called "Urban Administration and Management" at Yale University. That was perfect because both gave me a better opportunity to explore in detail government - what government does and how I could be a contributing part of it. I enjoyed knowing I could make a contribution to make government more effective. It was a troubled time both locally and nationally because it was the aftermath of the Vietnam War. I worked for St. Louis County, and the City of University City, Missouri which was special because they had a phenomenal city manager, Charles Henry. He was one of the first persons to implement a housing code within a community and his goal was to try to make sure NOT that people were excluded but, to the contrary, that all people were included. He did not believe it was fair that landlords would provide some people with shoddy, inferior quality housing because they could. He is probably one of the early spokes persons who recognized governments had an obligation to help develop standards so that all people had decent housing. And so, for me that focus has been particularly relevant. Today, I serve on the Illinois Housing Development Authority Board, and that's our mission: to provide quality, affordable housing for all people throughout the State. At the time, University City seemed like a long journey from our home in Illinois, so my husband and I decided to move to Madison County although both of us were from St. Clair because we both were fortunate to have good jobs.

SH: Keep [unintelligible] moving this closer to you

MK: He went to work for Specialized Services and it was a great opportunity for him because they specialized in providing services to handicapped and disabled young people. He worked there for a long time and subsequently started ACT, and became very involved in designing and creating the Madison County Transit system as he recognized there were no local buses, no transportation, for the disabled

individuals

SH: [loud noises in background, unintelligible] transportation a particular interest uh, late Senator Simon, Paul Simon?

MK: That is a good question and I cannot answer that. Jerry would have to answer that for you. I am not sure as there were many community leaders, both political and business persons involved in creating MetroLink.

SH: I thought you, I thought Paul Simon was a strong advocate for the Metro Line, the light, the light rail system, that come over to East St. Louis and then up to Edwardsville and Alton.

MK: I would say that wasn't so much Simon as Durbin.

SH: Durbin, huh?

MK: I believe it was. But again, I would verify that because I think one of the key individuals at the time we finally built the MetroLink system was Jerry Costello. He was a County Chairman and later a Congressman from St. Clair County and really supported it. He saw the benefit of joining the two states, specifically; and also, the opportunity to help develop St. Clair County. He also was involved in the creation of the Mid-America Airport to support and keep the Air Force military base in O'Fallon. As of today, a rail system has never been built in Madison County, only St. Clair. A vote was initially turned down in Madison County and there has never been a re-vote. Madison County is unique in that unlike St. Clair County, there is no single transportation corridor in the County but several larger medium size cities and over time the Madison County Transit System buses have become the most effective at moving residents within and to communities and to St. Louis. This is why the buses now are so critical, because they service not only the entire County region but all the persons going to and from St Clair County and St. Louis for work, and who live in in Madison County.

SH: Well, let's get the focus back on you.

MK: Oh.

SH: So, after uh, you went to work over in University City, take us through the rest of your career and...

MK: Ok, after I left University City, I worked for a planning and engineering consulting firm in St. Louis for a couple of years. I then went to a group called SIMAPC, the Southwestern Illinois Metropolitan and Regional Planning Commission. It was created in 1963 by the local political and business leaders in the region as the federal government began actively promoting regional comprehensive planning. It was involved in water and sewer and roads and housing and all the services that you think of are a part of a metropolitan region. They were being funded in large part by the federal government, so these regional planning commissions existed throughout the country.

SH: So did this, did this initiative come out of LBJ's Great Society or Richard Nixon's presidency? Or was this under Jimmy Carter or Gerald Ford?

MK: This is the 1970-71 era, you tell me the answer to that question [laughter]

SH: Yeah

MK: It was a federal initiative, there's no question about that. And somebody perceived it correctly as there was a lot of support, apparently, because there was a lot of money available for implementation. The goal was to bring people together who were committed to bettering the region, not only the planners but also the community leaders.

SH: So how would something like SIMAPC get formed? Were, were the municipalities and the county governments uh, was this more than just one county?

MK: Oh, yes. It was doable because, remember the efforts were being partially funded by the Federal Government. SIMAPC was certainly more than one county. It was Madison and St. Clair Counties and then as time went on, it added more counties in the region. I believe there are seven now. The county boards would be asked to appoint people to serve on the board of the regional planning commission to bring their perspective about what actions could be taken to improve the region economically, upgrade existing infrastructure, etc... Ideas and perspectives would come from all of the SIMAPC board members after they met with their respective County board members. The role of the staff was to support the wishes of the Commission and help bring about the realization of their ideas and projects. That included putting together a thought process and a comprehensive plan and/or trying to get federal grants that would enable those things to happen. As I said, the Planning Commission is still in place. The East/West Gateway Coordinating Council is another active successor and it comprises all of the counties of the metropolitan region in both Illinois and Missouri.

SH: So then, so the planning commission would focus on infrastructure? Or and economic or primarily economic development?

MK: Both, infrastructure and economic development. These two elements are often totally integrated. You typically cannot achieve one without the presence of the other.

SH: hand in hand.

MK: Very much so. How do we make this region better, today? Transportation was always a factor. And at that time, it was interstates and primary roadways. Internal transportation such as buses and light rail were not high priorities, nor was air. There was minimal consideration of rail and barges. You are talking about the late 60's, early 70s, so, you are talking about roads and interstates connecting each other and providing upgraded transportation access. There was a great amount of regional planning that was being done. The theory was if you built the roads you would then end up connecting communities and providing opportunities for communities, business and people. I believe the whole concept of comprehensive planning came from that era of time.

SH: So you were part of the paid staff then?

MK: I was. Yes. I worked there until 1975 [laughter]. I then had a chance to move to Madison County to assist them establish their Community Development Block Grant program. And that was in the 70s, mid

70s. This was another federal program where moneys were given to counties primarily in large regional and metro areas, to do community development planning. This program had a much broader scope than infrastructure. It's focus was the entire community. The people, the housing, the transportation, the recreation, all of the elements you think about in planning a desirable community. Madison County was awarded a community development block grant, which was great! Fortunately, I had had a chance to get to know the county chairman, Nelson Hagnauer, while I was working' at SIMAPC and, another gentleman by the name of Matthew Melucci who worked for Nelson Hagnauer as the Director of Administration for the County. Chairman Hagnauer asked if I'd like to be the Community Development Director and I said yes! That was when I became Community Development Director and really got involved with Madison County. Establishing a Community Development Program with or without me was a very good move on the on the part of the County because it was a big decision - do we want to do this? We will have to make some commitments, but it would really bring a lot of value to our County and benefit the people of our County. So, that was what they did. And so, from then on, and even up until today, the federal government has continued to provide supportive funds to do community development block grant programs. Whether that's housing, or whether that's infrastructure, or whether that's, social services, the target is to improve the quality of life of the residents of the County.

SH: So, it was the funding was annual or was it a multi-year grant from the feds?

MK: It was kind of a multi-year in the sense that unless you really did something that was inappropriate and out of line, you had the opportunity to receive funds annually

SH: Okay, and uh, did it have a specific focus, uh, um, when you were the director? Did you, did you emphasize or prioritize housing over transportation or... how did you...

MK: The specific focus was on the people you served. So, it wasn't just a product that was important, it was how are you going to help people, particularly people who are perhaps not as well off, who need more support and assistance, whose neighborhoods need more support and assistance. Thus, the focus became what can we do, particularly to help those communities, as well as the other communities within the County's jurisdiction. As an example, a lot of emphasis was placed on trying to enhance the physical and social structures in Venice, or Madison - two communities that were by federal definition lower income and who really would benefit from the enhancements that were made to their housing stock, roads and schools. All of the County's jurisdictions were assisted by the County's programs. There was a focus on the people, there was a focus on housing, a great deal of focus on economic development, with the theory being you can't build the community unless there's something there to make it attractive.

SH: Jobs.

MK: Yes, jobs is right. That almost always became the critical element.

SH: What did you, did you then, as the director of this agency, did you disperse money to uh, to communities, uh...

MK: I did talk to the communities and their political leaders to obtain a better understanding of their problems and needs. More important, the County established a committee of County Board members who would meet with our staff on a regular basis to discuss these concerns that they had or problems that the Board members were aware of. We would ask the communities to submit applications that specified the needs and their requests and then once or twice a year allocate funds based on a need basis.

SH: [crosstalk] Did you ever re-grant dollars?

MK: As I explained, it was up to the County Board, as the County was the jurisdiction that received the original federal grant, so it was their responsibility and their obligation to redirect the money and they, the community development department staff to identify areas and projects that met the needs of the program. The best aspect of this program was that it enabled the County to assist residents and communities with a number of critical needs and not just one. It included housing, transportation and water, sewer, recreation and educational facilities; benefits that all communities needed and/or benefited from.

SH: Okay, you must have really gotten to know Madison County inside and out

MK: Yes. I did. I do know the county well [laughter]. It was great because the people of the County were and are wonderful people and there was a real interest of the County Board under Chairman Nelson Hagnauer. The County was committed to improving its jurisdiction and it did make it a little easier when you had federal dollars coming' in to help and provide assistance options throughout the County.

SH: What kind of... give us a couple examples of some of the projects that that you funded or got started that, that seem particularly...

MK: Particularly successful.

SH: ...successful.

MK: I would say most of the projects in fairness were not too exciting, but they were essential. For example, installation of water and sewer projects were critical because those utilities make a big difference to residents.

SH: Yeah

MK: ...in terms of the quality of life...

SH: Right.

MK: ...for people within the community. Transportation was always important also. That could include road construction and improvement, reallocation of bus service routes, etc. I guess however the one that, I most favored was housing. Monies could be used to help persons rehabilitate their houses as well as to build new units. You had an opportunity to do those three, and then you could reach out to address a fourth category and probably the most important was jobs. Most often however you had to undertake the others before you could bring persons in to say look, look what we've done with this area; come and

bring your jobs here; we have people who want to work, we can help you with an industrial or commercial facility, we can help you build a complex that will service you. There's no way for me to separate any one single project. I can remember some areas that were, I would say, pretty tough, and needed a lot of help and a lot of hand holding and enhancement. But they were part of the county, and the grants really made a difference to the people who lived there. As I think of the cities, in addition to water and sewer improvements and upgrades there were projects still in place now, including an industrial park in Granite City that has been very successful and have created opportunities for people in the area to come and work there.

SH: Okay, so, how did politics play into the distribution of, of the

SH: ...the funding.

MK: Strongly. The pressure from those who asked, "What can be done to help our neighborhood, community; I want MY people to benefit, these are my people" was always present. As it is today, it hadn't changed much, and so you couldn't take all of your money and say "Wow, the preponderance of low- and moderate-income people are HERE at this city, so let's not worry about any other city, because their people don't need anything, really." Well, politically, that was not acceptable. It just didn't work. So, you had to make some decisions about how do you really help? You had to set and then meet certain established guidelines, to determine how do you help these people that probably NEED extra special dollar assistance at the time. Because they weren't as large, or they didn't have other good things going for them. Thus, the political process was a very critical part of the program. That's why it was great to have a strong County Chairman who believed in the program and who made sure that, yes everybody benefited but not to the harm of some who needed more. We did projects in eastern Madison County, Highland and St. Jacob as well as, Eagle Park, Madison, Venice, South Roxanna, all of those areas. Unfortunately, the Community Development Block Grant program is no longer a high priority with the Federal Government and is in the process of disappearing, and that's unfortunate because it was a good program.

SH: Yeah

MK: And, it brought a lot of federal dollars into our region.

SH: Was there, was there strict accounting of how the money was spent? So you're pretty sure that money wasn't, um, frivolously spend or [unintelligible] or lining someone's pocket?

MK: Put it this way – I am not aware of the activities in every city and/or every county in this country and the answer therefore is no. I have been told that some of our neighboring entities, cities and counties, had little problems here and there following the rules but I would say our region was, Madison County was, successful in abiding by the rules and monitoring he activities. As I said, we had a strong county chairman and government and because we had a strong county government. They were committed to make sure that everybody participated but that the participation was fair.

SH: And from there you then moved on from, from the community development director, you... what did you do then?

MK: Matt Melucci, who had been the Director Administration and who had been with the County for a long time did two things. He left the County, the Director of Administration position, to become at that time the Director of East West Gateway Coordinating Council, which is a regional council representing counties and cities in Missouri and Illinois. It still exists today and is very active. It is responsible for making sure federally funded projects, particularly transportation projects are... spread throughout the region. EWGCC receives money from the federal government, not unlike community development, but on a much broader scale and then they work with all the governments, all of the counties and all of the major cities in the region to benefit the region. After Matt left it created a vacancy and so I happened to be in the right place at the very right time and so the County Chairman reached out and said: would you like to serve as the Director of Administration? And I said absolutely!

SH: Was this still Hagnauer?

MK: Yes, it was still Nelson Hagnauer. He was county chairman for many years and that was a good situation because it added tremendous stability to the County, to the county government, the decision-making process. He was there for a long time, he had a good reputation and he made a big difference in the quality of county government.

SH: What's the job of the county administrator?

MK: The job of the county administrator is to do the typical jobs of an associate executive. That person helps with budgeting, personnel, daily management, and interacts with persons from outside the County. They help with future planning, labor relations and union negotiations, supporting certain offices and assisting staff and department heads to determine what is the future of the county in terms of a comprehensive goal and direction. Mostly, my work was internal and often involved labor management relations. The County had several unions. They had a union at the sheriff's department, they had the county highway department union, the employees themselves were all unionized, so negotiations had to be had and people had to be hired. The way the County is set up, there's two divisions within the county. There are the elected officials, people you help to choose when you go to the polls and you select a county treasurer, a county clerk, a county state's attorney, etc. That's one whole group, but there is another group of people that are hired by the county board committees who oversee that department and they are under the control of the county board. They typically support the day to day administration, purchasing, planning and development in the county, and other activities. People who work with the certification of water/sewer systems, who work with the drainage and flooding issues, who are under the direction of the County Highway Engineer, all of the people who do the work of the County that is not specifically under the direction of the elected officials. The job of the administrator is to work with those people as their "department head". There are counties all over the country which typically represent very large areas like Madison and St. Clair do, so as a result there's also always discussions on what is the future of this county? What are the projects and the activities we going to do? Economic development becomes a primary activity: how do we make this county best serve its residents.

SH: This was, this is like the... part of your resume, your 1981-1985

MK: '85, right.

SH: Can you recall what some of the major issues were that that occupied your attention in that in the county board?

MK: Obviously budgeting, always occupied me and affected all County offices. The County is supported primarily by tax revenue; property taxes for the most part, as they support most of the county government activities. People do not want their property taxes to increase, so your goal is to try to be as efficient as possible while at the time getting things done. How do you get the sheriff's department to be a really effective sheriff's department, 'because that was under the county government, but at the same time not to spend a lot of money? Those kinds of issues were always in the forefront, quite honestly. Budgeting, how do you build a new jail? We built a new jail while I was there. That was one of the more difficult activities because the county had a very old jail. It was very old and was in very dilapidated condition. Well, we had to tear it down, and guess what, people were not happy with us. There were a lot of people who said that the old jail had value; we should never tear it down. It was a jail. How do you honor a jail? But we did with a plaque. There were people who really did not want to build a new jail, but to leave the existing one in place. Those were the kinds of issues I dealt with frequently. There were always problems working with other government and sub-units of the County. For example, there's a Metro East Sanitary District which includes Madison/St Clair County and its job really is twofold. It is a sanitary district with miles of sanitary sewer pipes and whatever is necessary to make sure that the cities in that area had, good sanitary services. Also, the Metro East Sanitary District initiated building the first levees. You also represented the County at meetings and discussions that affected the people and geography of the County as they were all part of the county. Also, there was a lot of money that went into water problems in the County on the western side. You have Horseshoe Lake, Long Lake and the Mississippi and the entire bottom lands basically had water issues, so there was a constant: how do you deal with the water issues down there, because that was part of the county, and its responsibility. The other big issue was just employees. Many legitimately wanted to advance themselves, so the unions were a very active group within the county. Legitimately so. But, you're on the other side. We did not have that amount of money to spend only on employees. How do you work through that, so everybody ends up happy? It did not always work out, but we tried. So that was what it was. It was truly what I would call a traditional administrative job. And there were people who worked at the county that were responsible for purchasing and procurement. All those people were under the direction of the county administrator.

SH: So is the county administrator is... civil service position? Or is it appointed?

MK: It was an appointed position.

SH: Right.

MK: Yes. We even had to assume responsibility for a short time for a cemetery that had gone bankrupt; they had donated all their property to the county. [laughter] And at the time the county also owned and operated a shelter care home, I don't know if you remember that.

SH: Yes.

MK: The Madison County shelter care home was the responsibility of Madison County government. So, the entire staff, the people that came there, the quality of the facility, became the county's responsibility.

SH: And why did you leave that position?

MK: I received a job offer with the Leadership Council. You can only be so good at a job for so long I believe [laughter] and then you make a few enemies now and then. Fortunately, I still had the Chairman behind me and he was very supportive but, people don't always like the decisions you make. You do your best, but inevitably, you decide it might be time to move to a new position. I moved on to the Leadership Council. The Chairman of Madison County, Nelson Hagnauer was a part of that original formation group just as the Chairman of, St. Clair County was. Both of those gentlemen were involved with the Leadership Council.

SH: So talk about the formation of the Leadership council.

MK: Oh my, that was an extremely well thought out but lengthy process. I'm going to say it started around 1981. I was at the County when the effort to create the Council actually started.

[recording stops]

SH: Okay, we're back. And working... so let's back up

MK: Okay

SH: And, uh, talk about this, talk a little bit about um, the formation of the leadership council. You were talking about Earl Lazerson. Earl Lazerson from SIUE and... Jim Mathias?

MK: No, Carl Mathias.

SH: Carl Mathias

MK: Carl was from Illinois Power. Carl had a friend by the name of Jim O'Flynn who was from the Regional Commerce and Growth Association (RCGA). It serves the Missouri side much as a regional chamber of commerce and has for years. What happened was that Carl Mathias and Dr. Earl Lazerson and a few other business executives and political leaders got together and had started to talk because Dr. Lazerson had a sense there could be another economic slowdown in the region and neither he nor any of the others wanted that recession to hit the region again. Dr Lazerson was at the university and the university was starting to grow and become quite an important asset for the entire region. Carl of course, did not want a recession nor did Jim O'Flynn to hit again because it had negatively impacted the St. Louis Metro Region including the service area of Illinois Power. During the recession and the downturn Illinois Power had to let go of many people. I believe that that was their initial motivation, but not their only reason to start talking and planning.

SH: It's fascinating that they had the foresight as did you in seeing the...the downturn of the industry

MK: I had no foresight, but it happened when I was around, so I'll accept credit for the foresight. But they understood that they had to do something to make sure a recession did not negatively affect our region again. They wanted to protect this region because this is where they were located. They started to identify other persons who were presidents and/ or CEO's of major businesses' including the refineries

such as Shell and Conoco Phillips. They also identified recognized leaders in the region such as labor union business agents, bankers, and others. I think of Ralph Korte who was not yet then but becoming a major construction contractor He was a strong supporter of the University. Illinois Power was already here. The university was in the process of developing but Dr. Lazerson wasn't then president. Nevertheless, he was still involved in planning the future of the school and the region. When Earl and Carl got together, those gentlemen, to their credit, realized that they had they had to do something, and so what they did Jim O'Flynn really facilitated. He said, I have money, my group has money, we'll give you \$50,000 if you go ahead and get this idea off the ground, because we really think there should be a counter party in Metro East, comparable to the RCGA, so we can have somebody to talk to, somebody to work with. Earl and Carl then considered their options and they said okay, and this is where Dr. Lazerson had such foresight. He realized and Carl agreed then that in order to be successful [microphone disrupted]they needed to be really focused on a small group initially to grow, but a small group that would include business, obviously, because business success was going to be critical; education, because obviously that was a key component, government because nothing was going to happen unless the two counties became involved, but where they really stepped up, they also said labor. Labor- management relations hadn't always been particularly friendly in our region. But they said yes, those were the people we need to work together with for the economic interest of the region. And so, that really was the core of the Leadership Council

SH: So what did it mean to work for the economic interest? You said you said that they were not involved or... [unintelligible] that they couldn't reach any kind of consensus for planning. So what was the purpose of the leadership council?

MK: Well because they wanted to develop a consensus for the future. The rationale behind bringing people together including those from several backgrounds, but not everybody initially was not typical. For example, there was some discussion about let's reach out, to maybe 100 + persons, maybe more? And then we will together once a month and talk about things for the benefit of the region. That was not the original direction that the Leadership Council took. It's direction was to get the key players in this region together including people who could make a difference so that if things problematic happened, they could be resolved because the right people would be sitting at the table, and they will understand because we have been talking about it, and that's why I say initially it was really a very small group. It started out with 10, 15, 20, and that was the core group that got together and said what can we do? How can we prepare? And the goal was to bring people to the table who hadn't been to the table. I'm talking labor particularly. Because think about that time. The refineries were active, Granite City Steel was active, all of those companies when they came back and were stronger, had strong labor unions and so there was real need to say we all need to get together and it's going to benefit all of us if we can move forward together. If you look at this article. you realize , Dr. Lazerson saw this as a situation where not only could we get our region together, to speak with one voice - labor, government, education, business - but also we would have a voice for the Metro East region in Springfield because up until that time nobody paid too much attention to downstate Illinois. I mean, think about Springfield, we had representatives surely, but the reality was that there wasn't a lot of money or projects being promoted for what I would call Southwestern Illinois. It's become Metro East now but at that time I'm not even sure it had the name of Metro East

SH: And did the Leadership Council take... uh, stands on specific issues, uh, for and advocate for like,

for, the levee system, for... flood control or... [cough]

MK: Yes.

SH: Uh, Scott Air Force Base

MK: Yes. Scott Air Force Base. The retention and growth of the whole military complex was essential. If that effort had not happened, it is doubtful that there would be a Mid-America Airport in our region today. In other words, the projects that we've seen become super important to our region and be successful, the Council was very involved in advocating for; but also they were creating relationships so that people who actually said look we have a problem here, they could all sit down together and talk and communicate and work out a plan to resolve that problem. And that made such a big difference in terms of moving forward. The labors unions didn't have to fight the business leaders and the business labors didn't have to argue with the labor leaders, because they could sit and talk to one another and say, okay, let's work this out. And then of course you had the university saying, wait, we can play a role here, we can really help, we're a neutral group. We can make a difference for everybody, we'll be glad to assist. and the university did. They offered up office space, dollars, staff, that was a tremendous offering! It made a very big difference in the success of the Leadership Council, because had there not been that support... it wouldn't have lasted. Yes, it was wonderful that the RCGA stepped up and said yes, we'll put some money in. At that point in time not everybody was prepared to pay dues, they were a small group of people, so where do you get the money to go ahead and provide support for these people? Where are we going to meet? How are we going to make sure everybody knows what the issues are? At that time the university stepped in. Had they not stepped in I don't believe the leadership Council would have survived.

SH: Good. You're the first director.

MK: ...I was the first directly paid Director. There was an interim director in 1983 as Illinois Power offered up one of its people to assist. His name was Greg Nieman. Subsequently in '85 the board decided they would like very much to hire their own person, so I was the first selected staff person.

SH: And where was your office?

MK: In the university. It was in Earl Lazerson's office.

SH: It was in the... chancellor's...

MK: In the university...

SH: ...suite.

MK: That's correct. He was not chancellor then he was president.

SH: President. That's right, that's right.

MK: It was in the President's office, that's correct. Yes.

SH: Uh, those days in the university, uh, I remember, uh, President Lazerson pushed hard on economic development...

MK: Yes, he did.

SH: He was very concerned and interested in that and wanted and believed that the university had a role to play.

MK: He did, and he made sure that he was involved and that everybody else got as excited and willing to participate as he was. I think he saw that if the university was truly to become, how do I say it, a major player, that this region had to become more of a major player in both the St Louis Metro area and the State. As an example, if the university had been built in an isolated area where there were not a lot of jobs or opportunities, or people moving into the region, then the university would not have been as successful. So, his vision, I think, was not only enhancement of the university, it was for the betterment of the region. And as I said earlier, because there was a recollection of how bad the previous recession had impacted our area; it was Dr. Lazerson, Ralph Korte, Carl Mathias and several of the major labor leaders including such men as Dean Turner, Ron Shevlin that wanted to make sure that it would never happen again. They all played a major role. These men were strong leaders and there were disagreements between them, but they were committed. Also, many of the industrial leaders immediately stepped up. Monsanto Company in Sauget, Shell Oil in Wood River, many of the major industries ultimately became participants.

SH: Do you think the cooperation and the formation of this group... was somewhat unique?

MK: Very unique. Because, you know why? The primary uniqueness was the inclusion of labor. Earl and Carl had the intelligence and the foresight to reach out and say it's not going to do any good if a group of business leaders get together and talk about what are we going to do and damn those unions. That was not going to work because they were a pretty essential part of everything done. So, they reached out to organized labor, which wasn't common back in the early 80s. The unions were strong, much stronger maybe even than they are today, and they had the ability to make or break an industry. Their involvement in bringing them to the table was - was foresight-truly real foresight. And it was hard at first, because they hadn't ever really worked together, so that was a first. In terms of their commitment to work together. And there were times, it was tough [laughter]. I can remember a labor leader from East St Louis who was in charge of one of the local laborers' union, Ron Shevlin. He was very strong minded, understandably, for his people. He was however, ultimately, one of the best supporters we had. He demonstrated that leadership and determination when a group of people from the Leadership Council labor-management committee would go to Springfield, and say "we have our act together!" "We need this or we need that, or what about helping us with this project?" A lot of dollars were subsequently committed by the State. It was because this group was able to say "we are united in this situation. We all have the same belief, we all want it to happen."

SH: Interesting that with, with the... Madison County was involved within the rust belt and the decline of the heavy industries that occurred all through the north...

MK: [unintelligible]

SH: ...part of the Midwest and that that a group got together to pass, to formulate a positive response or to help map out new directions, um...

MK: A plan, never to let that happen again. I don't remember a lot of the quotes regarding the collapse of the industries, but if you talk to several of the original members they spoke about how it was very hard on lots of people, and that you had cities that started to deteriorate; you had property tax revenues going down so the governments were affected, you had... all kinds of bad situations. I'm not going to pick on East St. Louis but that was then one of the cities that was most adversely impacted. It has never really recovered from the tremendous loss...

SH: Mm-hmm.

MK: As time passed the core group expanded their circle to others that needed to be a part of the decision making, and then introduced them to the labor leaders and to the others because, people from throughout the region didn't really know each other as well as they do today. They did not know the St. Louis individuals, as they didn't really interact with them because there were not... reasons to do so. So, if you think of all these big, heavy hitters coming together it made a difference.

SH: It did make a difference.

MK: Oh, I believe it made a big difference [laughter]

SH: And from the Leadership Council you then you moved on to SWIDA - southwestern...

MK: I did.

SH: ...Illinois Development Authority

MK: Right. That's correct. Yes.

SH: And what did you do there?

MK: SWIDA was an organization that had several unique powers including the option to issue bonds which were backed by the State of Illinois to enable development to occur in Madison and St. Clair Counties. As the first Executive Director, I helped guide the issuance of over \$150 million in economic development bonds, the establishment of a multi-bank Community Development Corporation providing loans to small businesses and the acquisition of land for the MetroLink Light rail in East St. Louis. One of the goals of the organization was to provide money for projects requiring financing on a regional basis. The State not only created a Southwestern Illinois Development Authority but recognizing its value created multiple development authorities throughout the State. SWIDA was unique as it had the moral obligation of the State of Illinois and that made a very big difference because the moral obligation of the State essentially stated that in the event this bond issue fails, because of an inability to pay, the State of Illinois will step up and cover the debt owed. That's significant!

SH: Yeah. Yeah. And where were some of the project that you...

SH: worked on at SWIDA?

MK: Most of the projects, I'm trying to think about this, most of the projects were industrial projects. They were designed to try to help the industries undertake projects that they really needed but maybe didn't have the cash on hand to make happen.

SH: So, they go back to kind of infrastructure kinds of...

MK: Infrastructure that was needed; support for industrial projects that were needed.

SH: Like, like what for example?

MK: The ones that I can remember the most included the expansion and upgrade of Monsanto in Sauget for approximately \$13 million in 1989; support for Shell Oil in Wood River for \$3 million in 1991; and assistance to Laclede Steel for \$25 million in Alton in 1990. There were also a number of infrastructure projects such as the upgrade of the Tri-City Regional Port District in Granite City in 1989; as well as the undertaking of social welfare projects including assistance to St. Elizabeth Medical Center, Anderson Hospital and Illinois Center for Autism between 1989 and 1994. Over time, SWIDA started focusing on more economic development projects. I guess one of the most important projects was when SWIDA got involved in the MetroLink construction. SWIDA got involved directly in the MetroLink project helping the East St. Louis segment become a reality. That was a pretty critical step forward for MetroLink because, it had to get it into St. Clair County, and much later, to complete the line through to MidAmerica Airport and Southwestern Illinois Community College. It came into East St. Louis and through St. Clair County. Now, today SWIDA is still very active under the guidance of Jim Nations, their Chairman, and Mike Lundy, Executive Director doing a lot of housing projects. – They are assisting in the construction of low- and moderate-income housing for the region; completing senior housing in communities such as East Alton Highland, Granite City, Swansea and Belleville.

SH: Okay.

SH: Now, so you've been, over the last...

MK: [microphone interference - unintelligible]

SH: [microphone interference - unintelligible] years [Both laugh]

SH: Since the 70s... particularly since the 80s...you've been intimately involved in significant changes in the construct of significant economic and demographic changes. Can you talk a little bit about that? Can you talk about what are... what are some of the things...what are some of the changes that have occurred?

MK: Hmm... that's difficult. It seems that almost everything has changed. This region...was a pretty sleepy part of the state of Illinois. In fairness, it's not as if we were receiving a lot of attention from Springfield, particularly when competing with Chicago and their metropolitan region. We were never really considered a part of the St. Louis Metro region historically because the state line is at the Mississippi River. Perhaps two of the most significant things are: number 1, the fact that the State of Illinois became aware that there truly is a southern Illinois region and that it has economic value and

brings value to this State, and number 2 two, the metropolitan region of St. Louis has determined that after many of its banks and businesses started doing business in Illinois: that the Metro East is an integral part of the Metro area. This happened after a major movement by the Leadership Council, which is continuing today, to reach across the river and say we have to do some projects together, So, that was a big change, the biggest single change. I remember. First, we had people come over and start to work in the Illinois region. Several them were the consulting people and the engineers, but then the banks - the banks crossed the river. And all of a sudden, the banks became a part of southern Illinois. So, if you look around, banking investment is...the same in Illinois now as it is in or was in Missouri. Almost, all the banks that service St Louis have money invested in Illinois too, so they care about its success.

SH: So what, what do you think, what do you think is the change? Why did the banks all the sudden say [unintelligible] let's invest in Madison County?

MK: Right. I think they saw things happening. And they wouldn't have seen things happening if those people in the original Leadership Council and their successors today, not just the business leaders, but he total hadn't reached out and said this region's changing. It has a lot more going' for it than you understand. That's my belief and I will always believe that. I believe the Leadership Council brought together leaders from education, because of the University and Dr. Lazerson being there; received large business investments because they had the principal leaders of business involved in this region and they had cooperative labor unions. And that, that together was significant. And then on top that they added government. And those four entities became... involved with each other, and so supported each other, and started to say collectively we all need to work together to make this region successful. And I believe that's how it happened.

SH: The whole, the whole economy shifted...

MK: Shifted.

SH: ...in, in the last half of the 20th century from heavy industry to something else. And...

MK: We haven't given up heavy industry

SH: No, we haven't given up [unintelligible]

MK: [laughter] Fortunately [laughter]

SH: ...it's not the dominant.

MK: It's not the dominant any more, no.

SH: And the population shifted as well. Uh, I think that...that the census shows big growth for a while and the uh, in the population, and also the different kinds of people who moved and came.

MK: But I think that, I believe that, that shift is the result of the University's presence and leadership. If you look there are several developments in Madison St. Clair and Monroe Counties that have made a difference but, singularly, the most significant development in Madison County has been the University

because, look at the combination of peoples that it brought into the region. Students from all over the US and the world, including local students who stayed. A Leadership Council Board member for example, lived here, John Fruit got his degree here, and stayed in the region making a contribution. He was a major banker. Ralph Korte did the same and he was a major contractor and businessman. The University brought in the students, brought in professors from all over the country to be here, to live here, with their families and then to stay here, because why not? So, I see the University as special and when I look at St. Clair County, they've had a lot of major developments also. Scott Air Force Base and the addition of Mid-America Airport - wow! It' presence has had a tremendous influence. Both Madison and St Clair Counties and to a lesser extent Monroe County, and all of the region has benefitted, I think from, from that increase and change in population.

SH: What... what is some of the... the issues, you think, that Madison County's facing now?

MK: Hmm... I think probably, right now we are in transition as a majority of the elected officials are newly elected and are Republicans and they are trying to develop what they perceive is. A more efficient government structure given the many roles and responsibilities counties in Illinois have today. It is a big job, but the County has... a lot going for it, having settled the issue of the levees. All three of the counties, Madison, St. Clair and Monroe became a part of the coalition that, was involved in doing the levee restoration; that was critical. But, county government now has... many responsibilities and not much money nor support from the State. [laughter]. The State of Illinois doesn't have much money, and the State of Illinois is not a highly regarded state economically among our fifty states unfortunately right now. I think the County's problems are going to be like many of the problems the State has. It is going be difficult for the County to shine... right now, with the State of Illinois having the problems that it has financially. That's... that's a personal opinion, but, money is critical for our school districts, its critical for the construction and upgrade of our infrastructure, it's critical to be able to incent business to locate in Illinois, critical for everything the state of Illinois does, and unfortunately that money isn't available for the projects that would benefit this county, this region, this whole state.

SH: You know, it's, it's often been said that uh, Madison County, uh, was... had a democratic party machine from, I don't know when until when but...

MK: Long time. All the time I was at the County democrats were the primary office holders.

SH: But you were, you were thick in the middle of that.

MK: Right.

SH: Now, how did that, how did that work? How did that quote machine...

MK: I did not think of the County leaders as part of a machine. Almost everybody supported the direction the County was going'! So...that was good! And there were people who assumed leadership roles, who other people respected, so there was a willingness to work with them and support their ideas, and they simultaneously were willing to reach out to those people from a different political perspective because they knew them, they worked with them. And so, there was a consensus on how we move forward. Right now, there's growing pains as we shift into a little bit of a different structure. And, that's okay, ultimately that's the way things go. It just takes time when, new people come in as they have new

ideas. It is important to make sure those ideas, when for the benefit of the County, are supported as they go forward. They are coming in at a difficult time when the State is unable to provide them the economic support they need.

MK: I feel badly because this is not, it's not just Madison and St. Clair or Monroe County. It's the entire state.

SH: Yeah

MK: I am not sure how you correct the economic situation that the State has gotten into. I truly don't. I'm glad I'm not up there. [Both laugh] I do believe we have options however and it will take bold leadership and a willingness to work together for the betterment of the State and its people, politics aside to figure it out. It will however get figured out. The good news is, and this is what I believe about the Leadership Council: here we are, approximately 30 years later but it is still going strong. It's a different organization now then it was. In the initial phases it was designed to create something that didn't exist; now it's goal under the leadership of a very successful Executive Director, Ronda Sauget, is to retain, maintain, and build upon what already exists. That's a different agenda. But they're doing a very good job. As I mentioned, the number of persons who support the Leadership Council is a hundred plus people and they are from several Southwestern Illinois counties not just Madison and St. Clair. They meet monthly, they talk about how we can improve this region, how do we make it stronger, and that is good. It really is a great thing. And a lot of this involves not the same people from the 1980s but many of the same organizations.

SH: So, so the institutions that the, you were involved in everything from the county, the county board... uh... the uh, the NGOs, uh, like SWIDA and um, leadership council all

MK: Remember SWIDA was created by the state [laughter].

SH: But is SWIDA a state agency?

MK: No.

SH: Okay.

MK: It is not a state agent. It is a regional planning body, but it must abide by many of the State's rules and regulations...

SH: Okay.

MK: It doesn't get money from the state. Not at all. It must finance its own way - in other words, its obligation is to help develop this region and in so doing, also raise the money necessary to be able to support itself.

SH: So, for, just for, from your personal perspective then, um, the change, the breadth of change that you've seen since the 70s to... where we are, the second decade in the 21st century. How would you, how would you... characterize that grand sweep of...

MK: Good. [laughter] Look at all of the people that are here that would have never been here. That to me is significant because obviously you want the region economically to be viable, and it's not going to be viable unless there are people and business as those entities create economic viability. So, from my perspective, that has really helped to make a major difference and, it has improved the State's opinion of our region. The state is investing money in southwestern Illinois when they had not invested much before. It's committed to the expansion of. Scott Air Force Base, and Mid-America airport. Look at Madison County's bicycle trail system, over 180 miles of bicycle trails. Who would think that that is relevant, but people come from all over the country to visit here and bike and see the region and say "wow! this is pretty impressive!" When we get on the bike trails, the number of people we meet from out of the region is... phenomenal. [laughter]

SH: Yeah. Right.

MK: And it is good, because they come, and they often stay overnight, and they spend money so then the cities have money to support them, it benefits the cities in terms of the tourism facilities and the tourism goals. Southwestern Illinois is just a very different, more dynamic region than it was 20 years ago. There's a lot more people willing to work together on behalf of the region. I don't, I don't believe that that existed back in the mid-1970s. It was very... I don't know what the right word is, but there wasn't that collective "We care" that seems to be part of the region now, there just really seems to be a lot of people who collectively care, and I think that's good news. [laughter]

SH: Now, it is. I think that's great. This is, this has just been great stuff, Mary. And uh, and uh, the documents you've given me are terrific.

MK: They are very good. Read through them. The article that was written with respect to the original Leadership Council, I thought was excellent, because it included quotes from the people who were involved. Carl Mathias and Dr. Lazerson and, all of those persons mentioned who were very much, a part of the effort.

SH: Right.

MK: One of the articles mentioned the intense competition between Washington University and SIUE as to where should the Olympic Festival Track event be located. It was part of the Olympic Festival celebrated in the St Louis Metro area. And obviously, in fairness, Washington University had a leg up, because they were part of the original Olympic celebration. SIUE was designated to hold the Festival event for several different reasons, but mostly because the University and a lot of the local leaders, Ralph Korte, put up the money necessary to make the track happen. It has been an asset to the region, hosting Special Olympics and other special events but mostly to SIUE. But that's not a bad thing.

SH: [unintelligible] do you think, uh, um, it's a good thing that, that... Jay Hoffman, state representative Jay Hoffman is introduced...

MK: Do I? Yes.

SH: ... Separate the...

MK: Sure, I've thought that for a long time

SH: The system? Yeah?

MK: I do. I think this region is the perfect example of a region that has recognized that to be successful it must help itself. This regions' people going back to the 70s saw what they could become again, after the recession. And so, they decided they had to do something to prevent a relapse, and they did. I don't think that's happening now in deep southern Illinois. I don't think that's happened in Carbondale. And because it hasn't...the population is declining, and there has been a negative impact on the success of the university down there...That is not the case, here however. The university is growing, the region is continuing to grow, there is a positive attitude regarding the future...We are lucky we have a St. Louis Metro across the river, but it's really made a difference that we can stand on our own two feet.

SH: Yeah.

MK: I think it's really made a difference.

SH: I do too.

SH: Yeah. Well again, thank you so much, this is, is...

MK: Well you're welcome!

SH: ...really great stuff.

MK: I apologize for forgetting many of the details, as I told you. [laughter] It is hard to remember, it was a long time ago, and there were so many good things that occurred. You know, there are other people, too, that hopefully you can talk to. I didn't mention Bob Koepke and I should have. Bob isn't with us any longer but, he was a part of the university at the time. I am sure he left many records...

SH: Yeah.

MK: ...and of course Dr. Lazerson gave him the opportunity to, undertake some development activities with respect to the local communities and that was a really good thing that helped a lot because, he could reach out to them and say hey the university cares about you, we would like to see you do this, how can we help? [mic interference] ... that kind of activity. A lot of foresight that happened back in the 80s that has led to where we are today.

SH: I have been trying to get Jerry to agree to talk with me. I know he's really busy, but other than Jerry, who else do you think we, I should talk with?

MK: Wow, I wish Bob Wydra had not passed a few years ago away because he would have been one that I would strongly suggest. Bob was the director of the Tri-City Regional Port District

SH: Port authority.

MK: But there's a young man, Dennis Wilmsmeyer, who is director now and is doing an extraordinary

job...

SH: Yes!

MK: ...If you haven't talked to Dennis, I would reach out to him for two reasons - number one, his father was Melvin Wilmsmeyer. Mel was a banker on this side of the river. He was one of those people like John Fruit that was involved in the early stages of the leadership council once we reached out to the banks. They were critical. Dennis, [unintelligible] not only has the sense of his dad, but also has been there under Bob ever since the port has started to grow. I don't know if you've been down there recently. It is amazing.

SH: Is it?

MK: Just, what they have done and the impact that they have had on the facility. Oh my gosh, it's unreal! I mean, at one point in time, it was just an old army storage facility. You should see it now, it's different. Thus, there's this whole new focus on river development and how do we use it. And what an effective method of transportation it is economically. The other thing, and I don't know who to tell you to talk to... [cough]. I'd have to ask. is... the people from Amazon for example, who choose to locate their warehouses in Madison County., It's not as if we would reject the warehouses; we'd like more. [laughter]. But at the end of the day, this is a major business that's come into the region. It has developed the warehouses, built the buildings, worked with the labor- management people in this region, and they've been amazingly successful. So, who is the best person to talk to? Let me ask Jerry, because he knows, he works with those firms all the time, because the busses run to serve Amazon employees.

SH: Mm-hmm.

MK: Transportation is just critical.

SH: Yeah.

MK: So, you know, St. Louis, St. Clair County have Metro, but here in Madison County we have a major transportation program that allows everybody to get around, get to places they need and is affordable.

SH: Yeah. Thanks Mary.

MK: Oh, you're welcome. Good luck!

SH: This has been great.

MK: [laughter] It was interesting, I enjoyed it.

SH: Good.