

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

Ed Hightower Oral History Interview

Steve Hansen, Interviewer

Mannie Jackson Center for the Humanities

Edwardsville, Illinois

September 28, 2017

Steve Hansen (SH): I'm Steve Hansen and we're talking with Ed Hightower. Today is September the 28th 2017. Thanks, Ed. It almost makes it sound like a radio interview doesn't it? [chuckles.] Ah, you've had a major impact on life in Madison County; culturally economically, educationally, politically, and so I'd like to hear from you a little bit about your life first tell us about growing up and where you grew up, and some of the challenges you faced.

Ed Hightower (EH): Well see I've been very fortunate I grew up in Southeast Missouri the Bootheel around Hayti, Missouri that's headed south toward Memphis, Tennessee right off Interstate 55. Worked in the cotton fields picked cotton, chopped cotton, it's hard to believe that after so many years individuals would think that I was born in that type of a culture. But...my...

SH: Were your parent's farmers? I'm sorry to interrupt

EH: Yes. My parents were farmers worked in the cotton fields and so on, there were 8 siblings, 6 boys 2 girls and I'm the second oldest of 8. My parents divorced when I was 14 years old. I'm sorry when I was 12 years old. And, it was a very devastating time for my family growing up, no father in the household, and in 1996, I'm sorry, 76, my parents my mom migrated to Alton, Illinois because of the booming industrial age there was Olin, glassworks, steel mill, you know, Alton was a major industrial town and so my mom went to work there and ah 1966, and we were very fortunate to have the type of income from my mom's work that allowed us to go on and get an education again, 8 children.

SH: Now where did she work? Do you remember?

EH: She worked at Olin.

SH: At Olin?

EH: At Olin. And in 1970, I graduated from Alton High School, of course, I was a pretty decent athlete, along with my 5 brothers and I went to SIUE on a basketball scholarship and of course wanted to go into teaching, was fortunate enough to graduate from SIU in 1974 with a bachelor's in education. Went back to my hometown of Alton, and was hired there and the rest is history. I began to move through the ranks of teacher, assistant principal, principal, then assistant superintendent of the Alton School District. In 1996, I was offered a contract to become the superintendent of the Edwardsville School District.

SH: I'm sorry, what year again was that?

EH: In 1996.

SH: 1996, okay.

EH: And if I may add at SIUE I received my bachelor's, my masters, and specialist degrees all from SIUE. In 1997, I received my Doctorate of Education from Saint Louis University. I spent 19 years as Superintendent of the Edwardsville School District. Another avocation that I was fortunate enough to get involved in was NCAA Basketball. While attending SIUE from 1970- 1974, you know, being a poor kid, not having the resources that many of the other young people was blessed with, I started refereeing intramural basketball at SIUE in the old bubble gym. [chuckles] And I worked intramural basketball and was paid \$1.25 per game. And people often ask me "Well gosh, Ed, you know, you were very fortunate to be one of the top referees in the country represented the United States at international competition, how did it all happen?" And I share with people if you can referee intramural basketball with some of those former athletes and some of those wannabes and get threatened [both laugh] then certainly then you can endure that it sets you up to move on and do whatever you want to do. But, upon graduating from SIU, in 1974, my wife and I were married and I needed to continue finding some form of income along with my teaching so I continued refereeing open center league basketball, so I got a pay raise I went from a \$1.25 per game to \$5.00 a game. And I would referee 4 games three times a week and I thought guys that was just wonderful. I then was fortunate enough to get my Illinois High School license to become a high school referee started refereeing high school basketball in 1976, and from that point, it all evolved. In 1981, I was added to the Big 10 staff and I spent 33 years in the Big 10 and 36 years refereeing NCAA college basketball. During that time, I worked 12 Final Fours, I was fortunate enough to represent the United States at international competitions such as The World Games in Buenos Aires, Argentina, I represented the United States at the Goodwill Games in Saint Petersburg, Russia, and then I was the runner-up at the Olympics Salt Lake City, Olympics and you know, who would have dreamt that a country boy working in the cotton fields back in the early 60s would evolve and grow up and have the type of career that I've been fortunate enough to be part of? And then from that point, I, someone saw something in me, and I when I was at SIU, I had one of my biggest supporters were Chancellor Earl Lazerson and Earl Lazerson took me under his wings put me on various committees as a student at SIU, and that helped to kind of move me into that area. Particularly my love for SIUE you know, guy shows on various committees, the foundation, and then it all evolved to becoming a Board of Trustee member for 12 years and at the same time I was on the Lewis and Clark Board of Trustees so giving something back to this area has always been what the fabric that I was made of; my mom taught all of we children that it's not what we received but what we're able to give back that makes all of the difference. And volunteerism, making a difference, giving opportunities to other people, she made it clear that that's how we work out our soul salvation, and if you can believe that, and that's been my life, so, I've been very fortunate.

SH: Well, you've lived quite a remarkable life. If we could go back a little bit, tell me about some of the challenges you faced when you were Superintendent at Alton?

EH: Well, when I was assistant superintendent in Alton as a young person growing up, again, the old saying that it's difficult at times to really advance in your hometown, it's difficult that's about a true of a statement as could be. But I was fortunate enough to have some great support from the community as my family had been part of the Alton community and again 8 children, 6 boys who were all athletes, my mom was very involved in the community and we were made to go to church, and get involved in the community, so, we were well respected and well received in the Alton community.

SH: Was Alton very segregated in those days?

EH: Well no, Alton was integrated when I moved there okay, but again, things were starting to open up as far as African Americans having an opportunity to advance up through the ranks at that time. So I did not hit the real segregated movement when as I moved to Alton but I have to say to you when I was in the South, that's when I in the early 60s when I experienced it. I was one of the first group of students to be integrated into an all-white school. They closed our African American school, I was in 4th grade at that time and they moved us to about 20 miles about 15 miles from our home. And we were bussed there and certainly moving into an all-white school, it was difficult. I was a good student and I tell the story on a regular basis that one of the challenges was to be treated as an equal in a fair equitable way. I could remember so vividly when I was in 5th grade, I was a very good student by the way, and I wanted to be a patrol a safety patrol. And one of the things that you had to have was very good grades, no disciplinary issues, and I wanted that orange belt, you know? Remember those [inaudible chuckles] walk around. Well, all of a sudden, my teacher recommended me to the principal, there were probably about 10 of us, and I was the only African American recommended, and he did not select me to be a patrol. Okay. And, I'm in the classroom with about 4 other kids that were selected and there was no way that their grades were as good as mine. Well, I was devastated. I was devastated. And I went home and I told my mom, and my mom's position was simple. It would have been nice if you would have had an opportunity to be a patrol. But I don't send you to school to be a patrol. I send you to school to get an education. I don't want to hear how disappointed and upset you are. Life is full of disappointments and setbacks and it's all about you getting that education so that someday you will be able to get to a position where you can help other people. I mean it was as stern of a lecture as I could receive. And I think I just reiterated how she said it [chuckles] and that always stuck with me. There are going to be setbacks. You're not going to get what you always want in life, but the key thing is, you keep your eye on the prize or your eyes on the prize, don't lose your focus, and you keep working hard. And, I tell young people that - I've told young people that over the years and I and I tell - I've told my told my two daughters, my wife and I, Barbara, we will have been married this November 2nd, 43 years. We have two daughters, both successful, our oldest daughter, Julie, lives in Chicago, pharmaceutical salesperson, and then she has a social media site called "A Better Day With Julie" giving back to people, and making life better for them. Our youngest daughter, Jennifer, she's an associate Madison County Judge, and we've told them the same thing, and my wife comes from a big family as well. 17 children, graduate of Alton High School and graduate of SIUE. So we tell those stories that we have a lot in common, but more importantly, you know, my contributions to Madison County have been few, and they have been no more than what other individuals who wanted to see this area improve and grow give back to mankind. And that's what this is all about as I see what I've done, been a lot of people helped me along the way, and my goal has been to be in a position to help other people.

SH: Well, you've done - you've helped a lot of people in our area. And you had a remarkable career. When you were Superintendent in Alton, what are some of the big issues...?

EH: Assistant Superintendent in Alton; I was Assistant Superintendent in Alton, and Superintendent here in Edwardsville.

SH: And when you came to Edwardsville, in 96?

EH: 1996.

SH: Okay, what are some of the let's go back to Alton, when you were Assistant Superintendent there, what were some of the big issues you dealt with in the Alton School District.

EH: Well I was the first African American, Assistant Superintendent in Alton, the title there was a couple of African Americans that were Assistant to the Superintendent, but I was the first African American Assistant Superintendent and you know, challenges there's always come into form of having a very clear focus of what you want to accomplish and my challenge was curriculum, making sure that when you have 35% poverty, 35% poverty level, that those young people are being treated equitably, and have excellent teachers and make sure that the resources are available to them. So those are some of the challenges, but more importantly when I became Superintendent of Edwardsville, in 1996, it was funny, I was the first African American Superintendent here in Edwardsville, and one of our pioneers of the Edwardsville community, Bob Wetzel, the Bank of Edwardsville, Bob Wetzel was Caucasian, was like a father figure to me, and Bob had taken me under his wings even before I moved to this area, and when Bob Wetzel called me and said "Ed, I would like to come over to Alton and talk to you, on both a personal and professional level." And I did not know what it was, he would not share with me on the phone what it was about, came over and he said: "Ed, we have an opening for our next superintendent. And I would like for you to consider our position." Well, at that time, I was headed to the state in 1996 to be the Assistant State Superintendent.

SH: For Illinois State Board of Education?

EH: For The Illinois State Board of Education in 1996 when I took the job here in Edwardsville, I had a contract the State Superintendent was Joe Spatnola, and Joe had offered me a contract to be his number 1 assistant for the whole state of Illinois. So when Bob came over met with me, he said "Ed, I'll make it quick, some of we business leaders would like for you to be our Superintendent. Would you give consideration to that?" So I looked at Bob, and I said: "Bob, is Edwardsville really ready for a black superintendent?" And only Bob Wetzel, only Bob Wetzel he didn't even pause he said: "No. Edwardsville is not ready for a black superintendent, but Ed Edwardsville is ready for a superintendent who happens to be a black leader." One of the most profound statements ever made to me, and he said "If you come to Edwardsville, the business leaders will get behind you, because we want to develop this community, we are at the crossroads." And then from that point, one of my closest friends, two of my closest friends were on the school board, Jim Special was president of the school board, and Sandra Hudson was also on the school board, they hired me and from that point we began to change the course and direction of the Edwardsville School District. We grew from 5,000 students to 7,600 by the time I left in 2015. We became one of the top school districts athletically, academically, with performing arts, in the state. I oversaw close to \$160 million dollars in new construction. We changed the infrastructure, roads, we gave Lewis and Clark a presence here by partnering with Lewis and Clark to build the N.O. Nelson Campus, okay. Politically, I was tied in very strongly in Springfield and we were able to get a lot of resources to this area. And by being on the Board of Trustees with SIU, and having a great relationship with legislators in all, we were able to get things done for this area that would not have been done otherwise. You know, did everybody except me? No. As the so called first African American superintendent, no. There was a "wait and see," okay? But I have to say there was never to my face direct racism directed at me. And I will tell you why I would say that. I work long hours okay, I was in the community I was in Worden, all white community, I was in Hamel - an all-white community I made myself visible, accessible, and responsive to the needs of the citizens. And I was able to bring resources to this area so even my critics and there were critics, don't think for one second everybody loved Ed Hightower-- no, that's not and indirectly I would be naive to think that some racism didn't exist. But, the preponderance of people looked at me as a change agent, an individual who could get things done, and were willing to get

behind their leader for the good of this area. And, see that's gratification that I've received from all of this, and as I go around and talk to various communities about change in the culture, changing the direction this is what I say to them: "You have to work smart, you have to work harder, you have to be responsive, you have to be there when the lights are out." And I made it clear: 7 days a week, 24 hours a day you could call me, and you would get a response.

SH: Well, you changed the culture and the direction of Edwardsville School District and also you were involved in changing the culture and direction of SIUE. We grew from a small regional commuter institution and into regionally a nationally recognized and you're on the Trustees for that and you helped changed the culture for there as well. [28:52](#)

EH: We did and I was very fortunate, I was very very fortunate we had a great leader, we had a great leader in Glenn Poshard, great leader and Glen started on the board as a board of trustee, we had John Simmons and we had some other trustees that were outstanding as well but Roger Tedrick, Mark Hinrichs, Steve Wilkerton, we came on board and our goal was to take SIUE to the next level. And that was the key because where we're located, academically, SIUE has always been a great institution for higher learning from an academic point of view. But if we were going to attract students to SIUE, we needed to move from a commuter campus and make it a campus where students could feel the pride, the belonging, the respect, and make it more of a home for them where they could invest and reinvest in the university. That was our goal. And I tell you, I never work with a group of individuals, you just don't find a group of individuals, Steve, that walk in with the same goal. And it was not just SIUE, we did the same thing at Carbondale, we did the same thing, we fought like heck to get the pharmacy school here okay? We fought like heck when John Simmons made the major donation to the medical school. It's [inaudible] it was a unified board and then from that point, Doctor Vandergrift came on board, and we wrested we said it was critical that we hired the right person here. And from that point, we said okay we now have the campus moving forward, where students are starting to say: "I like this place." That's critical. "I want to be part of this place. I want to make this place my home. I want to reinvest." So now, what better way, we always had great performing arts, that was another key area. Then from that point, we said we have to start looking at our academic buildings, you know, if we're going to move to the next level, we have to start moving and construction to again build that pride. And, we fought ah you know some of the naysayers to move to Division 1. By moving to Division 1, we said: "We have now completed the circle." We now have campus residency; we now have nice buildings that are being retrofitted, and new buildings. Now if we add athletics, okay, the perception will be that we are a Division 1 University with research and all of the extras that go along that goes along with becoming a complete institution. And, so we – we talk about it now--we feel pretty good about some of the things that we've accomplished but it was not "a person." It certainly was Ed Hightower I was just part of what was happening in Madison County.

SH: Well, with the growth with Edwardsville School District, the growth of the university all coincided with the growth of the region. Do you see, this, the whole area of Madison County has shifted from industry, like what your mother came to work in, from Olin and the steel companies, and it's now a different kind of economy.

EH: Yeah. Let me talk about that just for a moment. 34:26 Bob Wetzel, he was a visionary, I asked Bob Wetzel and three other business leaders: "What do you want?" This was in 1995, okay. "What do you want?" it was in January when we started talking, in 1996, January of 1996, "What do you want Edwardsville to be?" That's the first thing. That is the first question: "What do you want the school district to be?" Let me

[be] clear when we define and it was clear, we are not going to be able to attract industry here, that was one; we're not going to be able to attract the large malls here. The Edwardsville School District covers 185 square miles. We at that time did not have the vibrant relationship with SIUE, as you recall, the school district did not. I have to give a lot of credit to Chancellor Belk, at that time, we sat and said: "We need to partner, if we grow and grow together, then we can support each other." Now, here's the key thing. When I asked the business leaders: "What do you want the community to be?" It was clear. "We want the community to be a bedroom community where people will say that we want to reside where our children here, in a safe vibrant and great community." "We want to have a relationship with SIUE, where our children will feel comfortable attending SIUE and not have to go thousands of miles away." Again, perception. Perception, it's the critical piece here.

SH: You say Bob Wetzel is one of the key leaders who else?

EH: John Fruit.

SH: John Fruit.

EH: Gary Niebur, Mayor Gary Niebur. Bob Plummer, Mr. Cassens, Alan Cassens. Dennis Terry those who are key architects right there, right there.

SH: That's interesting. When did you decide or how was the decision made to build the new high school in Edwardsville and wasn't there some controversy around that?

EH: Yes. Yes. When I came here in 1996 the high school building was finally under construction okay, there had just been all kinds of controversy, setbacks, with the high school, and overruns, cost overruns and the goal was that we would get that building squared away and came in worked with the board, from 1996, and we finished that building and we opened that building in 1997 I think it was--a year later, yep, a year later, and of course there was--there were, areas of the building that they had to take out of the construction package because of cost and cost overruns and so on and we were able to with the business community add items such as the all of the facilities, athletic facilities, the what is it called where we have the music in... performing arts the performing arts building. So we ended up raising a lot of different money. Hal Patton raised \$80,000 dollars and in kind work for all the trees that are now growing up around that high school, okay, in around the district through the arboretum project that he has always been very true to his heart, so the key thing was, one of the issues that I ran into as superintendent there was a promise made that we would build a building, and then, we would have a referendum education referendum to support the building. Well, of course the relationship with the community and the school district was not good at that time, there was not the trust, not the support, so the building is completed but no money to operate it. So we went back to the drawing board and we began to look at ways to fund the building we made cuts and um the business community stepped up behind me and supported a lot of initiatives the first two years of that building, and then from that point, okay ...

SH: So excuse me, was the referendum

EH: It failed. It was defeated. There was overcrowdingness in that because again with 5,000 students kids who are in elevators, kids were in unsuitable spaces, it was just not a good situation for the school district. So, we developed a 5 year plan and this 5 year plan consisted of: 1- looking at overcrowdedness okay, and at that time, we had 1500 kids at the old high school which is now Lincoln, okay so the first thing we took on

was how do we go about getting a community to trust that we would do the right thing, make the right decisions, and that's where I mean spending hours, and days out in the community trying to convince individuals that we could get this done. And with this five-year plan we decided that we needed to focus first on a new middle school. That was the first. And that we would not have all of the issues, setbacks with labor that we had encountered with the high school and the first time it was tough. But we were able to get Liberty Middle School and by the way, we purchased 48 acres of land out Goshen Road there, and remember at that time, that was just the wilderness but we had we did the research to determine: "Where do we want to go?" Again, remember, the question goes back to: "What do you want the school you know to be?" "Where do you want to go?" Okay, and we were able to get a construction grant program through the state and I helped write the bill Jay Hoffman, Senator Bill Haynes good friends of mine worked with some of the superintendents up North to get this construction bill whereby the northern schools would benefit from it, and Jay Hoffman, Bill Hayne they were the advocates for that bill that helped build Liberty Middle School. We got that building built, from that point, construction, new houses started to develop around that building. Now,

SH: Excuse me, was Governor's Parkway done?

EH: No. I'll get to Governor's Parkway ... I'll get to Governor's Parkway in just a moment [Chuckle] Well, from that point, we had Liberty Middle School just about built, now we needed money to address Goshen Road there and the road right in front of Liberty. Okay, remember there were 48 acres and we paid \$21,000 per acre and some of my critics they were screaming and hollering about the \$21,000 an acre we paid for that land, but we were fortunate enough the leaders of the community the EMGH Foundation, this was a group of business leaders, they purchased the land and held it for me until we were ready to get the construction loan. From that point, if you look at how much that land would be worth today, you know, you're looking at probably about \$75,000 an acre all in that area, So now, of the 48 acres we used about 24 acres of that we had enough land for 2 more elementary schools right there. As we, so after we completed our first five-year plan to address the middle school we needed to then focus on the elementary buildings. Goshen Elementary we put Goshen Elementary there, on the land. We then needed to put an elementary building in Glen Carbon again to keep the Glen Carbon citizens happy and to address growth out there. We needed to put a new building out in Worden to address out in the northern area, again, 185 square miles we needed to address, so, major tasks. So to build those three buildings and to renovate this was our second 5 year plan, and to sell that to the community was tough. It was \$68 million dollars for those buildings. And what we wanted also to do was to renovate the old Glen Carbon School, to renovate Lincoln School, to do other renovation work to Columbus Elementary our most historic building, we were able to get all of it done for \$68 million. Now, the first time we ran a referendum, again we had started to build trust in the community, we barely fell short about 1,000 votes. So we went back to the drawing board and that's when we decided that we needed to listen to the community we went back spent a lot of time listening and the referendum passed overwhelmingly. What we were able to finally address...address the building needs of this community.

SH: Do you remember what year that was?

EH: That would have been let me see, don't hold me exactly to it, but that would have probably and I've been gone 2 years, 5 years, about 9 years ago. Yeah, 9 years ago. Now how did we get to Governor's Parkway? Okay. Jay Hoffman was, Representative Hoffman, was the state representative. We met with Jay, and said "Look, we have the schools going out here, but we can't get kids to school." And at that time, the connector from SIU to 159 was complete. But, no money to finish Governor's Parkway out to 55. Met with

Jay, Representative Hoffman, said: "Hey we've got to have a way to get these kids to school. We need to connect Governor's Parkway and finish this connector." We didn't have the money for Glen Crossing. The village of Glen Carbon had completed the road construction, Glen Crossing, to 159 but they have stopped right there. Well, we were building the new school, Cassens Elementary School out there off 270 there, so we got the \$24 million dollars for, from Jay Hoffman he was able to get it done through the state, to finish Governor's Parkway and approximately \$3.5 million to finish Glen Crossing. From that point, you can see how things are starting to come together, the community, the school district, SIU, oh and by the way during that same time, we were fighting for our SIU science building, that \$80 some million dollar building [chuckles] so, we're fortunate that again Jay Hoffman, Senator Hayne they are the two that we were able to meet with on a lot of occasions and it's all history, so when you look at where we were in 1996, and what we used to really push was this is what Madison County, Edwardsville is the county seat. It's the county seat. Everything should be pushed out from the county seat to other communities as well. So, this was the stimulus to push redevelopment, new development, out to other areas.

SH: There's been a, when you look at over time, a shift ,or tell me if you think I'm right, that there's a shift from say where the political and economic powers in Madison County were maybe Alton and Granite City and that seems to have shifted and you were not just witness to that shift to Edwardsville / Glen Carbon, but you were part of that shift, you symbolized part of that shift coming from Alton, but also you helped develop that shift with your involvement with the Edwardsville Schools, Lewis and Clark, and SIUE.

EH: You know the Enterprise Zone, I can remember when we started talking about the Enterprise Zone, Chairman Dunstan from Madison County, Gary Niebur Mayor Niebur, Bob Wetzel some of the powers to be, again, this was critical as well, as we started to talk about we were not going to get the main industry, a big industry here, the industrial age was pretty much done, but we had to redefine who we are--we well had to define, what we wanted Edwardsville and this area to be. That was all part of this shift as well. Again, the critical piece here is asking the right questions: 1. What do you want to be? What do you want this area to look like? What are the obstacles to getting it done and what are the advantages to staying true to what it is that you're trying to achieve? And that's what we've done in this area. We've stayed true. No criticism of my former town Alton, no criticism, I love Alton, but I don't think we made the shift in Alton, Granite City, in saying: "Wait a minute, the industrial age is moving away from us, are we ready to take the next step of defining--defining what we want to be?" When you look at all of the resources right on the Mississippi, going up the River Roads, Grafton and all you, look at the historical significance of Alton, we were consumed too long with the industrial, and I would say that Granite City: same way. If we don't take a hard look and do an examination of what it is that we want to be 5, 10 years, then we won't be ready to make that shift when the opportunity presents itself, and that's the critical piece here.

SH: Excellent. Excellent. Tell us, talk to us a little bit about how you came to know Mannie Jackson and how the...how you decided to become involved with the center here?

EH: Well, Mannie Jackson and I we knew each other--we got to know each other through sports it goes without saying, Mannie Jackson, great athlete, from Edwardsville and he has lived a very compelling life, you know, when you look at his life story, graduated from Edwardsville High School went on to University of Illinois played basketball and went into the corporate world, ended up purchasing the Harlem Globetrotters, we got to know each other because I was referee, I was on the national circuit, so was he, so we go to know each other, you know, I'm Superintendent of Edwardsville, he's from Edwardsville, and then the issue came probably about 11 years ago, now, the issue was what are we going to do about the old

Lincoln School, this building that we currently reside in--and of course Mannie attended Lincoln School here. Herman Shaw and I we talked to Mannie about preserving this building. I could not take this building on as Superintendent of the Edwardsville School District, there was no way my critics would not have allowed that--so, Mannie Jackson through a lot of persuasion by Herman Shaw, who is a resident of this area, President of the Lincoln School Alumni, persuaded Mannie to purchase the building. Mannie purchased the building and again, we had met with Jay Hoffman, Mannie and I to look at trying to retrofit this building through the state to preserve it. That's when 9/11 hit and of course the economy just absolutely tanked. And, from that point, we had to look at different alternative I was on the board at SIUE, I was on the board at Lewis and Clark Community College, Mannie had purchased the building and was holding the building until he determined what he wanted to do with it. I introduce Lewis and Clark to Dell Chapman to Mannie and we began to talk about how we could maybe make this, make good use of this building, and again, I was still on the Board of Trustees at Lewis and Clark at that time, we were able to get the \$4.5 or so million dollars through working cash--I'm sorry through life safety--to preserve this building. Mannie then donated the building to Lewis and Clark and we named it the Mannie Jackson Foundation. To work from a humanities point of view around research, with the core values of respect, dignity, understanding, and forgiveness. Working with SIU now in a lot of different ways to further the research with the STEM initiative that we're working on and some other areas, to make this area a very strong humanities area that will reach not only Madison County, but across the country. So that's a quick summary of that and so when I retired as superintendent two years ago, I said I would come here for a couple of years to help get this jump started and so we're just about there, so we're looking forward to a new chapter, finishing this chapter soon and moving on.

SH: When is some of the things that you hope that the Mannie Jackson Center is going to be used--be doing to fulfill these four values?

EH: Well, you look at programs and we have currently have the conversation toward a brighter future for all Madison County Schools; high schools and middle schools are involved in the project they are--they identify an issue in their schools and they try and solve the issues that they've identified around our core values of respect, dignity and understanding and as it's all about the raising the level of conversation among young people. When you look at how polarized our country is today and such diversified society, you know, there isn't conversation in, you know Martin Luther King say you know "people just don't listen to each other anymore they don't understand each other because they don't talk to each other." You know, they don't talk to each other because they're afraid of each other. Well, if we don't raise the level of conversation, then we're going to continue to talk around each other. Research: Mr. Jackson would like to focus on the environmental issues facing the country not just water, food, and so on from a global point of view, and so those are some of the areas, the STEM: when you look at our STEM initiative, working with the SIU STEM department out there, with the recent hurricanes in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, you know you can see the importance of the humanities in understanding that there is an issue with the environment if we don't start addressing the issue of food, look at Puerto Rico, look at what's happening in Texas look what happened in Florida, you know, so all of this come together and two years ago when we opened the center we brought in General Colin Powell to help kick everything off and thanks to SIU and SIU has been a real true partner in some of the initiatives; last year we brought in Kareem Abdul Jabar; this year we are looking at bringing in Naomi Tutu, Bishop Tutu's daughter from South Africa, so you know again, those are some of the engagements that we are working on.

SH: Ed, you've - let me shift kinda gears again - you have lived over the last half of the 20th century and the

first quarter of the 21st century and you've been involved in so many different aspects of the life of this county and shaped its history, its direction and to your very remarkable career, what are some of the things that stand out, looking back over the last 50 years, 40 years of your career, what stands out as some of the big things, the big events?

EH: Steve, that's a question I get asked often. I can't say what event you know, people ask me in the sporting world what Final Four do I remember the most? Well, they're all memorable when you do 12 Final Fours there are circumstances, situations, there are people, what great player do I remember? Well, when you do 36 years I have to say there are a lot of great players. There's not a single area, but I can say it goes back to when I was young and my mom taught us that we need to be part of the solution rather than being the problem. And I would like to say that I think hopefully I've been and will continue to be part of the solution. The biggest impact on my life has been my family and particularly my mom and she's deceased now three years now, you know, how she instilled the core values about how you treat people, and giving back So I would never try to say it's about me, but I've been very fortunate and I have to tell you this story, you know, and I don't want this to sound sentimental. Eleven years ago, I contracted endocarditis a bacteria; a deadly bacteria and I almost died. And as I was lying in intensive care--intensive care and you know--I'm highly medicated, the bacteria my head was about to burst, okay, I was in so much excruciating pain, there are times and I grew up in a religious family, you know, I talked about how my mom reared us, as I'm lying there in intensive care and I'm highly medicated, out of it, I said a prayer to the good Lord and I said this, I said: "Lord, if I have provided the kind of support to other people, and I know that I haven't done everything right, but if I've helped people along the way, then spare my life. If I haven't then, you know, do what you need to do." And that was the simple prayer I made. If I've helped people, well I think, you know, I was spared, and as the doctors told my wife, told my family, and my mom, and others, we don't know if he's going to make it or not, and if he makes it, he could be a vegetable. Well, since that time, you know, I've been as vibrant and hyper and so on as ever. And that's it in a nutshell, helping people.

SH: Well, you've done a tremendous amount and it's been a privilege to work with you at the university and to watch all the things that you've helped us accomplish and [phone vibrates] [mumbled voices] no I just wanted to say thank you, really for both my boys went through Edwardsville School Districts, and they got an excellent education, and both my boys have gotten degrees from SIUE. And as a result, and so you've done a heck of a lot for the community and it's great to be able to record all this for posterity so other people can understand the fruits of your labor and enjoy it, thank you.

EH: Thank you, well, what I would like to do, Steve, I make no bones about it, I'm going do a book, another book, and it's going to be something of this order, talking about change agents and so on.

SH: Well, great.

EH: So, but I would like to do is get a copy of this and use this, any, who do you think is a good writer I'm going to get somebody to [tape cuts]