PRESERVING OUR HISTORY: ROTARY CLUB OF GREENSBORO

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Bob Newton

INTERVIEWER: Kathelene Smith

DATE: June 29, 2015

[Begin Interview]

KS: It's Monday, June 29, 2015. We're in Jackson Library. My name is Kathelene Smith and I am going to interview Bob Newton, who is a Rotarian, for the Preserving Our History, Rotary Club of Greensboro Oral History Project.

Hello, Bob. How are you?

BN: I'm fine, thank you.

KS: Thank you for coming in today.

BN: Yes.

KS: We're going to start by talking a little bit about your early life, so please tell me when and where you were born.

BN: I was born on May 17, 1940, in Long Beach, California.

KS: Oh, so far away.

BN: Yes.

KS: Did you grow up out there?

BN: No, I grew up in Wyoming. My family background is all in Wyoming. Long Beach had to do with my mother's displeasure with the medical care available in Wyoming and so she went to Long Beach, California, prior to my birth to be with the sister who raised her in that part of the country and then we came back to Wyoming after I was born.

KS: Were you raised in Wyoming?

BN: Yes.

KS: Spent your childhood in Wyoming?

BN: I was raised in Wyoming, yes.

KS: Tell me a little bit about your family and home life in Wyoming.

BN: Well, my father and mother were married in the early thirties. My brother, my oldest—he's an older brother—was born in 1936. My sister was born in '38, and I was born in 1940. Because of the family situation my father did not get involved in World War II but rather stayed at home and owned and operated and published the *Wyoming State Journal*— which was a bi-weekly newspaper there in our small community. And I grew up there—elementary school, high school. Town of about thirty-five hundred in the west central portion of Wyoming, on the road to Yellowstone Park, for anybody who lived south of Denver, Colorado.

KS: Did you spend a lot of time going there?

BN: Yeah. We spent a fair amount of time in Yellowstone and the Grand Teton National Park and in Cody, Wyoming, which is to the east of Yellowstone, north of Lander, where I grew up and where my family originally homesteaded—having emigrated from Illinois in the 1800's.

KS: That's wonderful.

BN: Yes.

KS: What other things do you remember from childhood?

BN: Well, it was a fairly normal upbringing. I remember a lot of my activities. Social and school activities and that sort of thing were in concert with Native Americans who occupied the Wind River Indian Reservation there at the edge of our community and went to the same schools. And I also remember that there was only one African American family in our entire community, and so as I have gotten older and become more sensitive to the issue of ethnicity and race relations and so forth, I think back on the situation that I was in at the time growing up, which I didn't understand or appreciate at the time, but now have a greater appreciation for.

I played basketball in high school; I was involved in athletics a lot. I worked—I began working when I was about eleven in a drugstore dusting the shelves. And except—and from that point until now—until I retired, I have worked, except for a period of about a month and half during my career where I was between jobs. So I've always worked—there's been quite a strong work ethic in my family because in growing up in Cody not all of my family were well-to-do. In fact, none of them were well-to-do and some were even less well-to-do than others, and so work was always a priority to make sure you provided

for yourself and then did what you could beyond that for other members of your family and others in your community.

KS: What kind of subjects did you like best in school?

BN: Physics.

KS: Physics, really? [both laugh] First time I've heard that one!

BN: I did okay in math. I loved physics and I did okay in math as I say. I did okay—I liked English but primarily because of the teacher rather than anything else; a very strict but very accomplished English teacher. And I took Spanish and I enjoyed that, and beyond that nothing in particular.

KS: So you were busy, between working and doing basketball and studies.

BN: Yeah, and other things. As a senior I was named "All Around Student" in our school—because I was in both the junior and senior play and I had the lead in both those productions, and I belonged to the glee club and the language club, as well as these other things. So I was pretty active. I stayed busy, always have stayed busy, and that started in high school and it's carried on ever since. [chuckles]

KS: Any other memories about childhood?

BN: No.

KS: You graduated from high school.

BN: Graduated from high school.

KS: And then what did you do?

BN: I went on to—well, first of all I went to Oregon State University. My uncle—my mother's younger brother—had played basketball at Oregon State and encouraged me to go to Oregon State and try out for the basketball team. I didn't have a scholarship or anything but I went to Oregon State for a year. Didn't make the team; wound up as the team manager when I was a freshman. But because of the out-of-state tuition the cost in—at Oregon State was higher that it would—than it was at the University of Wyoming, and so I came back to Laramie and finished my college education in—in Laramie at the University of Wyoming—three years—with a degree—a fairly general degree in commerce and industry. And my attraction to physics probably pushed me in a direction where I studied manufacturing and production management and systems engineering and that sort of thing in my schoolwork, but I was actually caught up in Air Force ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps]. Wound up as the top cadet officer of the ROTC at the University of Wyoming as a graduating senior, and as a result got a regular commission in the Air Force and joined the Air Force.

KS: So, right after college you went into the Air Force?

BN: Yes, yes.

KS: That's amazing.

BN: Yes.

KS: Well, anything else about college before we move on to the Air Force, because I'd like to hear about that too.

BN: No. Yeah, the University of Wyoming was my home country and I had a great time there; had a lot of fun going to college and participating in several activities and clubs and that sort of thing and it was just a good time.

KS: What were your favorite activities and clubs in college?

BN: Well, it was a sort of a student organization called Iron Skull, which was a group of individuals who were academically okay, at least, or better—and they got involved in a lot of service projects. Community and campus service projects. Basically a student-led organization, actually not unlike the Rotary Club— [chuckles]

KS: So, your interest in service began early!

BN: Yeah, it was that sort of thing. And then we had a lot of fun during freshman orientation, we—because we would—our student union building had a six story tower on the front of it and I was in what they called the Mountain Club, which was a bunch of people who thought they knew how to climb mountains. [both chuckle] And so, we'd get up on top of the building and rappel off the student union building.

KS: Was that sanctioned?

BN: Yeah, well, it just wasn't prohibited. [both chuckle] I don't know whether it was sanctioned or not. And, of course, our primary target was freshman girls.

KS: Of course!

BN: So we had a lot of fun doing that. [both chuckle]

KS: Did you do a lot of mountain climbing?

BN: Not a lot but some. I learned to mountain climb and ski while I was at the University of Wyoming. Plenty of opportunity for that sort of thing in that part of the country.

KS: I've never even met anybody from Wyoming!

BN: Oh, really?

KS: Yes.

BN: There aren't many of us—so it's unlikely that you would run into somebody.

KS: You graduated and you went right into the Air Force?

BN: Right into the Air Force. I went on active duty July 7, 1962, intending to be a pilot, and with reasonably good aptitude for that, but my eyesight failed me and so I wound up in the Minuteman missile business instead, and spent my career in the Air Force working with the Minuteman Missile program of the Strategic Air Command.

KS: Now what is that exactly?

BN: Minuteman Missiles? Minuteman Missiles are silo-based, solid fuel rocket-propelled intercontinental ballistic missiles that carry nuclear warheads.

KS: So that would have fit in with your physics background, as well.

BN: Yes, and the job. The Air Force had eight hundred ballistic missiles of that sort at one time scattered around that area of the country, and the job—our job was to essentially make sure 90% of them could be launched at any point in time. So we had to develop systems and procedures to make sure that if a problem occurred that it could be resolved promptly and effectively in order that we did not fall below that 90%.

KS: Is this still in Wyoming?

BN: Wyoming, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Montana. I travelled around some. I was in Great Falls, Montana, for a while. I was in Rapid City, South Dakota, for a while. And then I was in Omaha, Nebraska, at the headquarters of the Strategic Air Command at the conclusion of my term and tenure with that particular program before I kind of moved on to other tasks

KS: Where would these missiles have been pointed?

BN: Mostly at Russia.

KS: [both laugh] Because that was the big fear. That was during the Cold War.

BN: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, that was it.

KS: That's so interesting.

BN: Yeah, yeah.

KS: So there you were. Did you have any social life while you were doing that or was that pretty much what you were doing?

BN: Well, actually, my social life began earlier than that. I was married—when I was a senior in college my first wife and I were married, and over the course of our marriage, which lasted about fifteen years, we had four children. So during all the time I was in the service we were in the process of raising our family and moving from Laramie to Great Falls to Rapid City to Omaha. And then at that point in time I made a career decision to leave the Air Force, and it was not an easy decision for me to make because I had planned on the Air Force being my career, but once I got in it and learned some about it I realized that probably wasn't going to happen in light of the fact that I was not a pilot and that I was not an academy graduate.

KS: Oh, so it made a difference.

BN: It looked to me like there was sort of, a pecking order there that I probably was not going to be able to get around. Maybe I could have, maybe not, but the odds were against it. So I resigned my regular commission, got a reserve commission instead, went off active duty, looked for a job, found one, and we moved to Charlotte.

KS: To Charlotte, North Carolina.

BN: Yes.

KS: That's how you got to North Carolina.

BN: That's how I got to North Carolina, yeah.

KS: What did you do in Charlotte?

BN: Well, I went to work for a company that was headquartered in Omaha, but it was a very small consulting firm consisting of an individual who, at the time, was the Chief Financial Officer of Cudahy Packing Company, which is a big meat packing company in Omaha. He was also on the board of Nebraska Methodist Hospital, which was a fairly substantial medical facility there. He was well-acquainted with a partner with Arthur Andersen, who was a CPA [Certified Public Accountant]. He had an administrative assistant on his staff who was working on the issue of electronic data processing automation.

This was in an era of punch cards, and he had an idea that this technology could be applied to the operation of a hospital, having gotten that idea from his work on the board at Nebraska Methodist. And so, he put together a proposal to—to study and develop a—an electronic data processing system specifically for hospitals, and he went looking for the money to undertake this venture and found it at The Duke Endowment. And so, we all packed up and moved to Charlotte, because that's where The Duke

Endowment was and that's where the hospital was; Charlotte Memorial Hospital, which is where we first started that work.

KS: How long were you in Charlotte?

BN: I was in Charlotte that time for about three years. I was in Charlotte and worked with all three of those hospitals in that particular role, and also in Greenville, South Carolina. And the family, we—our family grew to its four children limit. [both laugh] And so, that was my, sort of, start in civilian life, having said goodbye to the Air Force.

KS: So, you were in Charlotte for a while, and in Greenville. And so, then what happened?

BN: Well, that project ended, and so, that started the three-month period during my life when I was unemployed and I looked around for another job. I thought at the time I would go back to Wyoming or the western part of the United States, and looked long and hard for a job and found only two, neither of which appealed to me, and so in the meantime my phone rang and one of my colleagues in the Charlotte project had since moved to Chapel Hill, to the hospital there at the university, and called me to inquire about my availability to come and work with him on projects there. So instead of going west, I went east.

KS: Went further east! [both chuckle]

BN: And we moved to Hillsborough; lived in Hillsborough but I worked in Chapel Hill at UNC for just a year. And then Duke University, who had gotten wind of all of this activity, called up and wanted me to come to Duke University Hospital and continue to work there, which I did, and at that point in time I was pretty well engrained in this kind of work and in the hospital industry and all, sort of, by just a combination of circumstances that you sometimes fall into or that you find, or they find you, or one or the other. So I was at Duke for seven or eight years and transitioned at that time from data processing to finance. My degree—my undergraduate work was actually in business and finance, and the systems work was interesting and so forth but I also had a very strong interest in finance, and so I ultimately became controller, or comptroller, however you say it, of the Duke University Hospital. And so, somebody else, sort of, picked up the ball on the data processing side and ran with it. So I was there until '78, I guess. In the meantime, my wife and I separated and subsequently divorced. And so, in '78 I was offered the Chief Financial Officer position back at Charlotte where I originally started, so I moved back to Charlotte and worked at Charlotte Memorial Hospital as the chief financial officer there for four years.

And during that time became engaged to and subsequently married my present wife, Donna, who I had met while we were at Duke. And I went to Charlotte, she went to Fayetteville, but we kind of kept in touch and things worked out, and so we were married in '81. I thought we were going to settle down and live in Charlotte and the phone rang again and it was Greensboro calling, [both chuckle] and the folks at Moses [H.] Cone [Memorial Hospital] said, "Would you come up and talk to us? We need somebody to be our Chief Financial Officer. So I came and we talked and we moved.

KS: So, you've been in Greensboro ever since.

BN: We came here in '82 and we've been here ever since.

KS: You've been here a long time.

BN: Yeah.

KS: Probably longer than a lot of people who were even raised here.

BN: Well, maybe so. Between the health system and the foundation, I was with Cone twenty-five years.

KS: You've been in Greensboro a while, so tell me a little about Greensboro in the early years. Have you seen a big change?

BN: Yes. I was introduced to Greensboro because my sister moved here from her Ph.D. studies at Northwestern [University] in 1969, and she was offered a faculty position at UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro]. And so, when she accepted that in '69, we would visit her often and so we were kind of acquainted with Greensboro a little bit even well before we moved here.

And our impressions at that time were that Greensboro was a very, very nice place to live. Residentially, it was perhaps the best in—in the state. And often people would say if we could pick our place to live and then look for a job instead of the other way around we'd go to Greensboro. But it was also considered much more of—and I think that this is true—of a stable environment, unlike Raleigh, for example, and Charlotte, in particular, where growth was in fits and starts and there'd be, all of a sudden, a lot of activity going on in Charlotte and three skyscrapers get built all at once. And the banking industry took over the city and so forth and so on. And state government in Raleigh, same way, but Greensboro just kind of rocked along, just kind of a steady, even pace—3, 4, 5% a year—but maintained that desirability as a place to live. Twenty minute town. Any place, wherever you are you can get someplace else in twenty minutes max.

KS: That's true.

BN: [chuckles]

KS: You had a really interesting perspective on North Carolina.

BN: Yeah. And the parks and everything about Greensboro spoke to its desirability as a place to live, and we found that to be the case and we were very happy to have found an opportunity to work here, and as a result move here and that solidified our, sort of, attachment to Greensboro. We didn't want to move, and we never looked for an opportunity to move, and the few opportunities that came looking for us, we briefly considered and then said, "No, thank you. You simply can't beat Greensboro as a place to live."

KS: Well, that's pretty impressive.

BN: [laughs] Yeah.

KS: What other things about Greensboro do you remember from all those years?

BN: Well, my sister, of course, lived here, we lived here, and, gradually, my children—our children—moved—well, my wife's children were already here. My children were not, but they gradually moved back to North Carolina and, in a couple of cases, to Greensboro. So the family began to, sort of, come back home over time, and so we had an increasingly active family life in Greensboro.

KS: Now, did you continue your love of the mountains?

BN: Yes, but there aren't that many mountains around here.

KS: [chuckles] I guess not compared to Wyoming.

BN: Compared to Wyoming, no—and my wife is more of a coastal fan. So we were torn a little bit between the coast on the one hand and the mountains on the other. I still like the Blue Ridge Mountains and we go there from time to time but we also go to the coast or White Lake, which was her childhood vacation spot down near Wilmington. But—I've had a thought but it slipped my mind now. I was going to mention something else but I can't think of it. I'll think of it in a minute.

KS: How has Greensboro changed in the thirty-odd years you've been here?

BN: Well, you got me back on track. It's—of course, it's built up quite a bit, and a lot of the roads that dead-ended someplace, like Holden Road, you go to Holden Road, it stopped at Friendly Center. That's as far as you could go. [chuckles] You had to kind of work your way around one thing or another. So there's been a lot of that sort of thing that we've noticed. And in lieu of climbing I took up cycling. And Greensboro is not the most friendly cycling town but it's not the worst either, and cycling was consistent with my interest in health. And career-wise, of course, I was involved with the hospital which is one thing, but then when Moses Cone and Wesley Long Hospitals merged in 1997, we formed the Cone Health Foundation and I became the first CEO of that organization. And so, I had the opportunity to reach out into the community, not as a provider of care, but as an advocate for healthy living.

And so, I got involved in a lot of the different programs and activities that would, theoretically, at least, contribute to healthier lives for the citizens of our community, one of which was physical activity and nutrition, and out of that came an interest in cycling as a physical activity.

Hiking, walking, the whole trail system of Greensboro became a—kind of a pet project of mine and a subject of increasing interest, and that in turn led to the present day activities that are underway to build the downtown greenway, and to connect a lot of

existing trails and pathways into a network of trails that actually go someplace. [chuckles]

KS: That came together in the eighties?

BN: Yeah, yeah, and the nineties. Yeah, yeah. So I got involved in that and I've stayed involved with that. I'm still on the steering group for the downtown greenway and still pretty active—very interested in and active when the opportunities arise to promote trails—trail use and productive trail use, and it's beneficial effect as far as physical activity is concerned. So that's kind of one of my little side issues that I've kind of stuck with.

KS: Do you still cycle or are you a walker?

BN: I cycle some. When I was in the military a buddy of mine got me out on the tennis court and started me playing tennis. My father played tennis in college but he never played tennis with me; he was always working. [both chuckle] And when you're the editor and publisher of a small town newspaper you do a lot of work.

KS: You didn't consider going into that line of work?

BN: No, I really didn't. You know, words and—I liked English, and in my later years I've developed my speaking and writing capabilities to whatever extent they exist at all; they are certainly better now than they used to be. But when I was younger I was much more interested in things—physics and machines and systems and tangible stuff—and not so much in the intellectual kinds of pursuits that you might think about.

So publishing wasn't at the top of my mind at the time. I have learned since that my father was a very successful newspaper publisher, at least by the measure of the publishing industry itself, and his activities in newspaper publishing and editing followed his father's. His—the newspaper—The *Wyoming State Journal*—was actually first bought and operated by my grandfather, who moved from Cody, Wyoming, to Lander, to own and operate the *Wyoming State Journal*, and then he and my father got involved with his dad, my grandfather, and then the newspaper got passed from father to son.

KS: Any siblings take it on?

BN: No, when my father left the newspaper business to go back to law school he sold it to a party unrelated to us. But I have since learned that my grandfather in particular, my father as well, took some very noteworthy positions, publically, on issues of the day which have been largely vindicated, if you will—or found to be reasonable and thoughtful and so forth. The most interesting probably being my grandfather's outspoken opposition to the internment of Japanese Americans at Heart Mountain—outside of Cody, Wyoming—his home—and he was the only newspaper editor, publisher in the state to speak out against that activity.

KS: That is really something to be proud of.

BN: Yeah. So there's a whole story there about the family history and his involvement in that. And he was—all of his brothers were ranchers, so he was sort of the odd kid out, but he made a name for himself as a newspaper publisher and as a very active statesman in the state before he passed away.

KS: That is really interesting that your father took it up.

BN: Yes, yeah.

KS: Back to Greensboro, what about the downtown area? I've been fascinated—I'm not from here—about how the downtown has changed, and probably in the thirty or so years you've been here it's probably changed a great deal.

BN: Well, it has, and yet I've been recently introduced more completely to what has not changed in Greensboro, and that's really quite a story in and of itself in my opinion. Of course, when I first moved here, and subsequent to that, the construction of the second Jefferson-Pilot building [Jefferson Standard Building] and the Renaissance Tower and the other improvements in Greensboro really began to put Greensboro—changed the face of Greensboro. And the traffic—various traffic patterns that we've tried out over time. [both chuckle] One thing and another.

The completion of Wendover Avenue. I'd compare that to Independence Boulevard in Charlotte. We built Wendover; they didn't build Independence Boulevard in the same way. We now have a very substantial thoroughfare right through the center of town; Charlotte doesn't. Things like that come to light. But, again, it's been kind of a slow and steady growth rather than lots of spontaneous or major all of a sudden growth.

But what I've also come to appreciate recently—more recently, has been the Preservation Greensboro organization and its efforts to preserve a lot of Greensboro's early architecture and so forth, and their success in doing so. If you go to downtown Charlotte, it looks pretty modern. You can't find much in downtown Charlotte that was there fifty years ago. It's all been taken down and put up—and something else put up in its place. You go to downtown Greensboro and you can find hundred-year-old buildings with a history to match and a story or two to be told if you find the right person who knows that story. And there are people in Greensboro who have followed those stories and kept them alive.

And so, I think that's really a positive part of our community, is that we have this preserved—largely preserved central business district that we continue to try to improve and develop in terms of its economics and its attractiveness, but at the same time preserve the historical aspects of it as well. And people are moving downtown. They like the idea, and so you can see—you can see the tide shifting and people moving back into the center city and I think that's great. I'm pleased to be a part of a community that—where that is the trend, if you will.

KS: And we were talking the other day about the park down there and—the carousel.

BN: Yes.

KS: Can you talk a little bit about the carousel?

BN: Yeah, parks have always been a big feature of Greensboro and continue to be, and the [Carolyn and Maurice] LeBauer [City] Park is a wonderful gift from the family to the city, and the Center City Park, of course, alongside it and the Cultural Arts Center and the carousel.

The carousel was an idea that was originally offered up by Bernie Mann, who owns and publishes *Our State* magazine, as a Rotary project, and he has pursued it, as have others in concert with his efforts, over a period of several years. It has not come to fruition yet, partly because of issues with a question of where to put it and partly because it's not a cheap project, and so there's this fund-raising component there that has yet to be fully realized.

But we began to give some thought to the fact that our Rotary Club will be a hundred years old in 2017 and would a project be a logical component of our celebratory agenda, and if so, what project might be suitable. And, of course, we immediately thought, "Well, we've already got one project on the table already. Maybe we should just use it," and the carousel wouldn't be a bad project for that purpose. And so, we've sort of, reignited some broader interest in the carousel because of its potential for being a part of our hundredth anniversary and, kind of, being a marker, if you will, of that point in time, and also something that would then continue to benefit the community at large, beyond the February 1 date when we have a big dinner party. [laughs]

KS: Is the carousel going to be—is it one that already exists, that would be moved in, or is it going to be created specially?

BN: Well, I think the original plan was that it would be built for us. I don't know as much about that as some other folks do. I do think it was planned to be a carousel of some substantial size; probably three, or maybe four rows.

KS: Yes.

BN: A carousel that size would be about sixty feet in diameter and require a chunk of space at least a hundred feet square or so. So it's a full-size carousel. A lot of people are familiar with the one in Burlington and it's—that's probably not unlike what we had in mind. There's a wide variety of—I'm learning, of carousels. Some of them are enclosed, some are air-conditioned for year-round use. Of course, those are far more expensive than open-air ones where you use them during good weather and you do something else in the—in the winter time. So I don't think any of that has been finally settled, although some people may have more firm ideas about that than others, but we're beginning to re-establish our knowledge base there and try to look at that as one, at least, as a potential project and a part of our hundredth anniversary. There are some other sites—siting will be an issue; where to put it.

KS: Sure. You need a lot of room.

BN: The ideal site for a project might not be the ideal site for a carousel. We haven't closed off thinking about other projects that might work in a particular site. And of course, there's a fair amount of sentiment for it being in the center of town because we are, kind of, the central Rotary Club of Greensboro in a way, and we think that that symbolically and as a practical matter would make more sense to have it—and it would be consistent with the efforts to keep the downtown area vital and growing and an integral part of our overall community. So if the right site turns up that may dictate to some extent what kind of a project makes any sense at all. And so, we're just beginning to really try to pin that down.

KS: That's an exciting project.

BN: Yeah, yeah.

KS: Obviously, service was always an important part of your life, right?

BN: It has been, yes.

KS: When did you get involved with Rotary in Greensboro?

BN: I joined the Rotary in 1987. My father joined Rotary in 1935 as the founding member of the Rotary Club in his home town of Lander, where I grew up. This was five years before I was even born. And he was a Rotarian from that day until the day he passed away, which was in—let's see. He was a hundred so he passed away in 2008. So however long that is he was a Rotarian.

And so, I had always been exposed to Rotary during my teen years and my college years, and when I was in the air force my father was fascinated with my work in the Air Force and so he invited me to speak to his Rotary Club on two or three occasions about what I was doing. I knew a lot about Rotary. He served as a district governor in the seventies and so we—it was a part of our family life by virtue of his participation but I never joined, partly because I was, kind of, bouncing around—career-wise and one thing and another. But then when he retired he moved to Greensboro.

He and my mother moved to Greensboro when he retired. My sister was here, I was here, so they moved to Greensboro and he, of course, moved his Rotary affiliation to the Rotary Club of Greensboro, and then immediately realized that I was not a member and so undertook the care of that shortcoming by proposing me as a member, and so I joined in '87 and I've been a member of the Rotary Club since then.

KS: What has been some of your favorite Rotary projects?

BN: Well, maybe the most significant, probably the favorite, too, is that I got involved in Rotary right away and there are several, sort of, very broad avenues of service that one can undertake, so my first activity was in club service and I became the chairperson of our annual holiday get-together and I produced that for two or three years and we had some good times with that.

And at that time women were not significant members of Rotary even though they were allowed, but the Greensboro club had maybe a handful of women members. They did have a lot of social activities that included spouses, and so we used to have a big party on—over Valentine's Day, and so that was a lot of fun. So socializing, so forth, was an original area of involvement.

And then I got involved in what's called World [Community] Service. Rotary also has a very significant line of work that involves clubs from different countries partnering with each other to undertake projects in one or the other of the countries that are partnering.

And we were approached—and I don't remember exactly how this all—Oh, I do, too, remember, yeah. One day at Rotary one of the guests are always introduced—was a visiting physician from Russia who was in the United States to meet with people in Atlanta, Georgia, and somehow or another he wound up in Greensboro on his way back to Russia and was invited to be a guest at Rotary. And so, several of us who were in the health care field went up after the meeting just to introduce ourselves, and Buddy Weill, myself, and several others who were affiliated with Cone Health at the time—Cone Hospital at the time—introduced ourselves and he expressed an interest in visiting the hospital, and so we said, "Well, we'd be happy to have you. You just follow us on and we'll go to the hospital."

So we took him on a tour of the hospital and during that tour he came in contact with the hospice unit, which was on the third floor of Cone Hospital at the time, and he was fascinated by that. And this gentleman was a—professionally he was a—what am I trying to think of—an oncologist, but he had another—he had another specialty as well but oncology was one of his two specialties, and so he was very much interested in hospice and hospice care and so that led to a visit to Hospice and Palliative Care [of Greensboro] on Summit Avenue. We took him on—we spent the whole afternoon with him—and took him on there and—and during the course of that time he let us know that he had been given an empty building in his village where he and his wife who was also a physician operated a medical clinic. And he—His dream was to turn that building into a hospice unit for his community, which was his village and several other immediately adjacent villages there in Moldova—in the Republic of Moldova. Moldova, a former Soviet country, very small, poor, mostly agriculture and not a lot of resources, and he was looking for a way to make this happen

And so, we said, "Well, maybe we could help you." And out of that, long story short, came a major project, the end result of which was a fully operational hospice that exists today in the village of Zubreşti, right outside of Chișinau, Moldova. Fully staffed, all of the core staff having been brought to the United States, home-hosted here by our Rotarians and friends, and trained by the hospital professionals here in Greensboro at Hospice and Palliative Care.

KS: Where you able to go there?

BN: Actually I misspoke. That hospice was a hospice that was established in Kirov, Russia; Kirov, Russia. I said Moldova but that's not right. It's Russia; Kirov, Russia.

KS: Where you able to go over there?

BN: I was in—somewhere. Oh, our daughter in the meantime was in Spain for two years with her husband as part of his career and we visited her in Spain and my wife came home and I went to Moscow; got on the train and went to Kirov, Russia, to check out how we were doing getting their hospice established. And so, I've been to Kirov, and we have a sister club relationship with the Rotary Club in Kirov, Russia, which is about—it's about nine hundred miles east of Moscow, I guess.

KS: What year was this?

BN: This was—would have been back in 2000-2005, somewhere around there.

KS: Was there any pushback from the Soviet Union or Russia at the time? They were okay with all of that?

BN: Yeah, they were okay with all of that. Kirov was an old industrial town, at one time largely involved in the production of war equipment and so forth, and they had this abandoned building and so they turned it into a hospice.

And it's still running. I correspond even today with a couple of people who are still involved in that, and several of our colleagues here in Greensboro stay in touch with people in Kirov, Russia.

The Moldova experience was essentially a follow-up to that. We were invited. We—myself and Pam Barrett—were invited to Raleigh to a reception for the newly elected president of the Republic of Moldova. Why we were invited, I don't have any idea. [chuckles] I haven't quite figured out who said what to whom, but anyway, we got the invitation so we went, and at the time we were looking for a project and so—because we had just finished this hospice project in Kirov. So we went over and we met the president and we met several other people. And so, we decided we were going to need to visit Moldova and see what's going on there and, "By the way, is there a Rotary Club in Moldova?" And there had one had just been formed, very new.

So Fred [Frederick] Levick and myself and Lane—Dr. Lane's wife—her name is Robin, Robin Lane—we went to Moldova to visit and learn about the country and what have, and came back impressed with the number of orphanages that existed in the country; children whose parents were either deceased or had had to move to other places in order to earn a living or whatever; variety of reasons. But it just seemed like a disproportionate number of these orphanages of sixty or eighty kids in each one of them and one of the—and the Rotary Club had, sort of, semi-adopted one of these orphanages and was providing a little bit of support to the orphanage and so forth, and we visited there and one thing led to another and we thought, "Well, that would make a great project. Let's adopt this orphanage."

And on the way back we said, "You know—" We also met a couple of physicians, and other work was going on in other parts of Moldova, and the—some of the work in these other areas had to do with health care and we thought to ourselves, "We just got through learning a lot about how to set up a hospice in a country that had limited resources and a community that had not much going for it, and maybe—maybe we ought

to put that knowledge to work instead." So we began to look into the issue of hospices in Moldova and there weren't any.

But there was a doctor and his wife who operated a clinic in Zubreşti and we made that contact and he was very much interested, and did he have a place where we could do it, and he said, "Yeah, I could probably get a building but it's a dilapidated building; it's an abandoned building; we'd have to rehab it and we'd have to fix it up."

"What about staffing?"

"Well, you know, we can't afford much staffing. We don't have very much money but we do have quality people and they're trained—they can be trained. We have nurses here," and so forth and so on. One thing led to another and we put this project together in—in Moldova. And so, today there is a Carolina de Nord—North Carolina Hospice in Zubreşti, Moldova, that's been there since—I don't know—2001—2000, 2001, and it's operational; fourteen beds hospice unit right next to the medical clinic that these two doctors still operate, husband and wife.

And so, those are sort of two back to back international projects to get back to your original inquiry. Those have really been the core things that I've been—the big stuff that I've been involved in.

KS: When Rotary takes this on as a project, what does that mean financially? Does that mean that it all comes from this particular Rotary chapter, or do you all get other chapters involved, because it must be a big expense?

BN: Well, it is and there's a variety of funding mechanisms. First of all, the Rotary organization—there are really two Rotary organizations. One is Rotary International which is all the Rotary Clubs in a—in a collaborative group. The partner organization is the Rotary Foundation, which is literally a foundation, and Rotarians contribute money to their foundation on a regular basis worldwide. And from that—from those funds, then, grants are available to Rotary Clubs who apply for and receive grants, usually on a matching dollar basis, to provide the financing necessary for one or another of these international projects. And there are, literally, hundreds, if not thousands, of these projects, like the one I just described, going on all over the world between Rotary Clubs in different countries.

A lot of it is U.S. to other countries because the U.S. is probably along with maybe Japan and a few other countries—Germany and France, England, Europe—some European countries far more economically advanced than some of the other places where you have large populations but not very much in the way of resources. Middle East, India, for example. The Far East, although Japan is pretty well off; South Korea's doing okay.

So that's how a lot of it gets done, but a lot of it is local money because you have to have the matching money to go with the foundation grants in order to put together the project. So if one club can do it by themselves they might do that. For example, there's a project underway right now to put a million-dollar water system into an area in Southern Mexico that just doesn't have a source of pure drinking water. And it's going to cost a million dollars to put in the wells and the treatment plant and so forth and fix that problem for that community—that geographic area.

The folks in Jonesboro, North Carolina, have picked up that ball and they're running with it and they're soliciting support from every other Rotary Club in the district, and they have it, and they'll use that with matching money and—from the foundation, and they'll raise their—they'll pull together the resources they need and ultimately that project will get funded, and it speaks to one of the several priorities that the Rotary Foundation is particularly interested in. Water and sanitation being one of the five or six that they really have a major interest in because their—of their perception that it's a universal and significant problem in many of the developing parts of the world.

So that's how that works. There's lots of different stories about how that all goes on but that's the general idea.

KS: It's amazing what you can accomplish—Jonesboro can accomplish.

BN: Yeah.

KS: Internationally.

BN: Yeah, exactly.

KS: That's an amazing story.

BN: Yeah.

KS: And, of course, there's the whole polio project which is so well-known.

BN: Right, right. Polio started out—we started out polio in 1987, I think, thinking that we would raise a hundred and twenty-five million dollars toward Polio. I think at latest count we raised more than a billion dollars, not counting the more recent matching money from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and I'm not sure if not counting is quite accurate, but I know that at one point in time Rotarians by themselves had raised over eight hundred million dollars and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation jumped in with matching grants to help us with that, and because of their interest in polio eradication. And we still have—every year we send teams from the United States to those very few places in the world where polio is still an issue, mostly in India now, and they're called National Immunization Days, and individual Rotarians will organize a team of twenty-five or thirty, and it's mostly self-financed, and they'll go. We sent a team last January; we're going to send another team this coming February. About every year our district sends a team to India to help with immunization of children there.

KS: Does Rotary try to pilot different chapters in different areas of the world or does someone apply to start a Rotary?

BN: No, usually Rotary Clubs are—are initiated by other Rotary Clubs. At one point in time the Rotary—the structured Rotary Club was a little bit more structured than it is now, and one of the dimensions of that was geography, and so the idea was that instead of reaching

out beyond your, quote, "borders," where whatever those were, the idea was to start a new club in a different part of town, so to speak.

And one of the other restrictions at one time was that you could only have a—you could only have one member of a given profession in your Rotary Club. So you could only have one lawyer, you could only have one doctor, you could only have one of this, one of that, one of this, and so Rotary Clubs tended to be very—relatively small. But because of that dynamic, the proliferation of clubs—if you got a second doctor you needed—just needed a second—another club.

KS: [chuckles] Sure.

BN: So that's the way that works. Some of that's gone by the board in recent years, and so you have a club like the Rotary Club of Greensboro with three hundred members, which is by Rotary standards a very big club. Half of the Rotary Clubs in the country are under fifty members. And so, the idea is Rotarians spawn additional Rotary Clubs and invite others to join and so forth.

KS: You sponsor them.

BN: Sponsor them, yeah.

KS: Okay, so one that would pick up in, say, Moldova, would be sponsored by one in that area somewhere.

BN: Right. Yeah, good example of that is we just this last week—people from Greensboro, and specifically from the Summit Rotary Club—just returned from Moscow, Russia, after having participated in the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first Rotary Club in Moscow. It was sponsored by the Summit Rotary Club in Greensboro because of some connection between a Rotarian in Greensboro and somebody in Moscow who thought it would be a good idea to start a Rotary Club in Moscow, and so between the two of them they made it happen.

KS: Have you been to many of the international conferences?

BN: I've been to three or four, yes. Yeah, I was in Brisbane, Australia, and I've been to Indianapolis, Indiana. Whee!

KS: [chuckles]

BN: And Chicago for the hundredth, and I guess those three, yeah.

KS: What are those like? Those must be amazing with people from all over the world.

BN: Well, yeah, they're big, yeah, and lots of impressive programming. There's a feature in the international convention called the House of Friendship, which is a huge exhibition. It's a coliseum-sized exhibition hall, if you will, that contains—I don't want to say booths

but that's kind of what they are—spaces. Row after row after row of spaces that are occupied by different Rotary Clubs or different Rotary programs or different this, different that, but you can see in the aggregate the worldwide reach and the worldwide breadth of activity that Rotarians somewhere in the world are involved in.

A fraction of that are people who have things to provide to Rotary Clubs who want to do things. So somebody who's figured out a solar oven, for example, and will make a solar oven if you want to provide solar ovens to folks in Africa who don't have any good way to cook their food. If that's your project they'll partner with you and provide the wherewithal that you need.

So there's a little bit of an altruistic motive behind that, but by and large, these are people who are well-intentioned and trying to support the basic work that Rotarians have chosen to undertake in one part of the country or another.

But it's a big group of people; usually eighteen thousand or so at our international convention. And of course, it moves around the world. It's in the United States about every third year but it's in other countries the other two.

Once in a while we run into political and logistics problems that cause us difficulty, but otherwise it gets around. And so, it's been in Thailand and it's been in South America. It's been in Korea, Japan, Canada, United States, Europe; several places. It's been an event all around the world and it's—and there are a few people who really look forward to that. There's one couple in our district who has been to thirty-two or thirty-three straight.

KS: International?

BN: International conventions, yeah. Yeah, I think he missed—I think they missed the last one only because of ill health. Yeah, he's eighty-some years old now, but otherwise they go—they've gone every year. And they're—he's not alone. I mean, he's a little bit of an exception but he's not alone by any means.

KS: It must give an amazing perspective when you're really at those conventions.

BN: Yeah, it does. Yeah, yeah. It certainly does, yeah.

KS: I know that you've been—a little bird told me that you've been quite involved on the district level; you've been district governor twice.

BN: No, that's a different person. Stuart Fountain—Dr. Stuart Fountain.

KS: Oh, okay. Bob [Cone] told me to ask you about that. [both laugh]

BN: Dr. Fountain was a governor, the second time primarily because of illness and subsequent passing of the individual who had been elected to serve, and so at the last minute we were without a governor and Dr. Fountain was—had been governor before and was available, personally, to be able to serve, and so he stepped in and served a second term, but that's the only time an individual has served twice.

KS: Okay. Bob had thought it was you.

BN: No, it was Dr. Fountain. I served as governor in three—2003, 2004. And I had been club president in the eighty—'98, '99, I guess. So that was very interesting and worth—very satisfying opportunity to participate in the activities of Rotary and to get around and meet a lot of people and help promote Rotary in the district, which is fifteen counties or so that are in and around the Triad area.

KS: Now, when you are president, do you pick a presidential project for your year?

BN: You mean when I'm—when you're a club president?

KS: Yes.

BN: Not necessarily.

KS: Did you have a project your year, or did you—

BN: No, not necessarily. Some do more along that line than others. And it's not necessarily a project exclusively. Some presidents develop a theme of some sort. Rotary International generally has a very broad theme that the Rotary International president will announce.

But it's usually in the form of a tag line, if you will. For example, the incoming president has focused his presidency around the idea of "be a gift to the world." And he has developed that idea as a kind of a theme, and you'll hear that and see that reflected in a lot of—well, not a lot of activities this year. It's very helpful, it's highly respected. At the same time, I think it's also fair to say that much of what gets done under the banner of that theme is not unlike what might have been done two years ago under the banner of a different theme. Because sooner or later it all boils down to the fundamental theme of Rotary itself, which is service, and these are just other—these are just various ways of expressing that in language that people can identify with and attach to and be inspired by, or newly inspired by, and so forth.

Sometimes there will be a project that may be a unique—I remember Steve Cobb, Dr. Steve [Stephen] Cobb, was president and his project was a million trees. And he was very active in Boy Scouts so he enlisted the assistance of Boy Scouts in the entire Old North State segment of boy scouting, and the idea was over five years we would plant a million trees in the district, and that's what we did. He started that project. Of course, other presidents had to pick up and support it and continue it and so forth in order to see it to fruition but that's not uncommon for that to happen; a project will last more than one year. And so, it gets started and, kind of, has the signature of an initiator, and then it may carry on for a year or two past that person's term of office in order to be finished.

The carousel project will be another example if we ultimately finish the carousel project. It started with Bernie Mann three or four years ago but may not finish until later. So there are some instances where projects identify with individuals but that's not necessarily a foregone conclusion that that's the way it's going to work.

KS: I know a big project that you're involved in coming up is the hundredth anniversary celebration.

BN: Yes.

KS: Tell us a little about that.

BN: Well, we'll be a hundred years old February 1, 2017. The Greensboro Rotary Club was sponsored by the Winston-Salem Rotary Club. Their anniversary is a year earlier than ours. They were a year old when they sponsored us, and that goes back to this business about rather than grow your own club start a new one someplace else, and a lot of Rotary growth in the early days was very much that way. It's amazing how rapidly Rotary grew in its early years, in terms of numbers but also in terms of geographic coverage. The first Rotary club was in Chicago, the second one was in San Francisco. You might have thought it would have been somewhere closer to Chicago, but it was actually in San Francisco, and then it went on from there. So we want to do something significant to recognize that hundredth anniversary, and I think we want to do something that not only celebrates the moment but also lasts beyond the moment and continues to be of value to the community and to continue to remind the community of the Rotary Club of Greensboro and what it stands for. Hence, a project of some sort that has some permanence.

I think we'll also put together a historical exhibit of some sort. A multi-panel display of some sort that traces the history of the Rotary Club and the hundred years of Greensboro during which the Rotary Club has existed. The highlights of that history, we'll have to get a lot of expert [chuckles] assistance and talent to help us figure that out and how best to do that; that sort of thing. But the idea would be that during our anniversary year we would move that exhibit from place to place in the community and it would ultimately then be a permanent backdrop to the podium of the Rotary Club of Greensboro at its annual—at its weekly meetings, along with the flags of the United States and Rotary and other things that adorn the venue where—whenever, wherever we meet. So that's a—and then a celebratory event of some sort, and we've already begun to—as you have to do—clear calendars and extend invitations to the individuals that you'd like to be there, and it's not—So some of that individual work has already begun because we're anxious to try to get on the calendar of the Rotary International president, for example—before somebody else gets on his calendar. [both chuckle] And, fortunately, several of us know him and so we're hoping that that will work out well and other dignitaries and—

KS: It's a big undertaking.

BN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KS: You've got a lot on your plate coming up.

BN: Yeah, yeah.

KS: [chuckles]

BN: That's my only project between now and February 1, 2017, for Rotary. That's—I've had to say "no" to a couple of other invitations and I've just told them—I said, "You know, this one I've already said 'yes' to," is all I can do, I think, and we only have one shot at this one, so we need to get it right."

KS: Yeah.

BN: [chuckles]

KS: Now, besides Rotary have you been involved in other philanthropic causes and volunteerism in Greensboro?

BN: Yes.

KS: Probably haven't had a lot of time. [both laugh] I don't see where you would have fit that in!

BN: Well, I have been. I have served on the boards of a number of non-profit organizations, probably ten or twelve, to be exact, starting with Hospice and Palliative Care and others that I was connected with during my—at the time I was still active professionally. I spent a lot of time with the YMCA. At one point in time I was on the board with Bryan Y[MCA] and also on the Metro board. I was on the board of the National Science Center at one time during the time that they developed their fifteen-year plan for expansion and growth.

I was on the board of PACE [Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly], which is a program for care for elderly—a daycare for elderly people. I'm on the board of NCCJ, the National Conference for Community and Justice. They principally run the ANYTOWN [summer camp] program for high school students in the summertime but they also do lots of other programming during the year. The whole mission there is the elimination of bias, bigotry, and racism in the community. It was originally the National Conference for Christians and Jews. My wife and I spearheaded one of their several mission trips to Israel a few years ago.

And there was—oh, and the last six, seven years I've been pretty active with the Interactive Resource Center. I was asked by the Community Foundation [of Greater Greensboro] to step in and help get it started, and so I did, and since we've gotten the building that we now occupy given to us, renovated, occupied, and now our new executive director there and I just rolled off that board this last June but remain as a volunteer. I'm off the hospice board but I'm a volunteer—still volunteer there. I don't know, other—[laughs]

KS: How have you seen Greensboro's non-profit sector change over the years, or have you seen it change?

BN: Well, I've seen it change some. I guess it's changed. I really began to get acquainted with the non-profit community through my wife, who started the—what is now the [Guilford] Non-Profit Consortium. She originally was asked to work with the Community Foundation [of Greater Greensboro] on neighborhood development, on the idea being to develop within individual neighborhoods self-serving capacity for whatever issues they faced.

I think one of the characteristics you went—you asked earlier about Greensboro—one of the characteristics of Greensboro is that it is very distinctly a community of neighborhoods, and some of that has to do with the way the land was owned and developed and so forth and so on, but the point is, is that there are a lot of very well-established and easily recognized individual neighborhoods; Sunset Hills, Westridge, Starmount, etc., etc., etc. It goes on and on and when you count them all up there's a hundred and fifty or sixty or seventy of them in the—in the greater Greensboro community. All of them have issues of their own and relatively few of them are particularly well-organized internally. They tend to—if there's something wrong with their neighborhood they tend to go to the city and think that the city government is the place to get things fixed.

And so, Donna's work was to try to empower and to equip neighborhoods with the resources and the enthusiasm and motivation to take on their own issues and be more self-reliant and more self-sufficient. That worked out pretty well, and out of that came the neighborhood congress, which you may know about or have heard about.

And it's now a self-governing 501(c)(3) [tax-exempt nonprofit organization] of its own and has, I don't know, eighty or ninety neighborhood members in it, and when issues affecting individual neighborhoods arise the neighborhood congress is likely to be involved in trying to be productive, in terms of resolving issues and improving circumstances and what have you.

Well, a couple of people in the community thought that the same concept would be very helpful applied to the non-profit, the world of non-profit organizations, and so she sort of switched gears and began to develop the Guilford Non-Profit Consortium, and that has developed in a similar fashion now, to the point where the Non-Profit Consortium is a fully operational entity of the Community Foundation with its own staff of a couple of people and a fairly robust agenda of educational and organizational development and support resources and activities throughout the course of the year.

And so, as a—sort of, a casual observer of this and then to a little—a small extent, a participant in one or another of their activities, I've seen the non-profits of the community come together in a much more cohesive and, in turn, effective way than they used to as individuals—sort of out there on the fringe of community life.

KS: You all are a powerhouse of service. [both laugh] I was going to ask you about your hobbies but I don't think you would probably have the time.

BN: You just heard about my hobbies. [both laugh]

KS: I think so. And you cycle and walk. Okay, I just can't imagine.

BN: Yeah.

KS: That's wonderful.

BN: So that's where the—I participate in one or two of the educational programs but just as a volunteer with the non-profits. And once in a while the phone will ring and somebody will have a question and I answer the phone.

KS: You should know better than that. [both laugh] Well, is there anything that we haven't covered that you would like to talk about?

BN: Well, no, I don't think so. My wife threw a wonderful birthday party for me.

KS: Oh, great. Well, good for you!

BN: I'm seventy-five now and so there are some things that I recognize I have been able to do over the last twenty-five years that I probably will not be able to continue to do over the next twenty-five years, at least at the same pace. And so, the question is, well, how do you transition over that time when activities and opportunities that you used to be able to take more advantage of than you can now—how do you replace that with other things that you now have time for and perhaps even a better ability for and can latch onto in lieu of what you used to do?

That's been a line of thought over the last year or two. My father lived to be a hundred. That was his objective and he made it short—three months short of that. My mother died when she was ninety-six, so I have a lot going for me in terms of time.

KS: You've got a lot of time. [chuckles]

BN: And I don't want to waste it. The kids are pretty much grown; the grandkids are pretty much grown. Our youngest grandchild is an eighth grader. Half of them are out of school. We have one great-granddaughter who occupies my wife's time a lot.

KS: Congratulations!

BN: So life goes on and you, kind of, try to think ahead a little bit and see if there's a new chapter that can be addressed and a new opportunity that can replace something that may—out of either necessity or otherwise be part of your history rather than part of your future.

KS: So it seems like you've done enough for several lifetimes!

BN: Well, maybe, I don't know. One day at a time.

KS: [chuckles]

BN: I tell the kids, "You know, don’t worry about yesterday because it's gone, and tomorrow's not a promise so you better do today what you can get done because you never know."

KS: Well, you've lived that.

BN: Yeah, yeah.

KS: Well, great. Thank you so much for coming in today.

BN: Well, it's been my pleasure.

KS: I appreciate it.

BN: I hope I haven't rambled on too much.

KS: Not at all; it's been wonderful.

BN: [laughs]

KS: Thank you so much.

BN: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]