

Sid Patterson

His legacy lives on in Tulsa's buildings, in its road infrastructure, and, most notably, in the *Up With Trees* program.

Chapter 01 - 1:02

Introduction

Announcer: In the 1950s, Sid Patterson worked for Patterson Steel, the family business, as a civil engineer. The company is responsible for constructing many of Tulsa's longstanding buildings. Sid was elected Tulsa street commissioner in 1953-1954 and served as street commissioner again for two terms, from 1972-76. He was one of the first local leaders to begin pushing for flood control, bringing about a new concept at the time: storm water detention. He was also among street commissioners to preside over impressive expansions in the city expressway system. Sid is best known for Up With Trees, which is responsible for planting thousands of trees since 1976. Mayor Bob LaFortune told him to form the group using volunteers and private donations. Sid served as Up With Trees' first president and as a member of the board of trustees. Sid Patterson died April 27, 2012. He was 91.

Chapter 02 - 8:13

Patterson Steel

John Erling: Today's date is April 29, 2009. State your name, age, and date of birth.

Sid Patterson: Sid Patterson. I was born January 1, 1921, so that makes me eighty-eight.

JE: Eighty-eight. Tell me about your parents and your family. Did they come to Oklahoma? Were they natives?

SP: My dad was born in Maine on a dairy farm. And my mother lived in a little town near Framingham, Massachusetts, called Holliston.

In the early years, my dad had a job working in a small textile mill there in Holliston.

And met Florence Rossen. They got engaged. And in the meantime, Dad's older brother had to come to Tulsa to work in the Oklahoma Iron Works. He wrote my dad and

said, "There's a job out here if you want to try it." To supervise a small steel-fabricating operation that the Oklahoma Iron Works was starting.

He came out, he was still engaged to my mother and he said, "If things work out we'll go to Tulsa eventually or I'll bring you out."

The company paid his rail fare out to Tulsa and said, "In six months, if we don't get along or you don't like the job, we'll pay your rail fare back to St. Louis."

And I says, "How come just to St. Louis?"

And he says, "Well, in 1912, they figured that a young man could make it on his own from St. Louis on." That was sort of the end of the developed country in 1912.

JE: Yeah.

SP: He came out and worked for this company. And after a while the oil boon hit Oklahoma and this company decided rather than being just a job shop, making things for other people, they were going to get involved in drilling equipment. So they closed the operation that he came out to supervise.

He and his brother then became sort of roving contractors and built gasoline plants for people like Sinclair Oil and Standard Oil. Towns like Drumright, Seminole, towns like that.

After a while, my brother was on the way. This was about 1918. In these boon towns he said, "Wasn't a good place to raise a family." So he came back to Tulsa, and he was hired by John Zink, who then was head of the gas measurements department for Oklahoma Natural Gas. And they had a problem in those early days of, "How do you measure the gas?" And that's what the gas measurements thing was all about.

He worked for John Zink and after a while there was something they needed and he said, Dad,—they called him Nate—"Nate, you used to be in this fabricating business. Why don't you take a leave of absence and set up a shop and make this product for us?"

Dad said that he took a year's leave of absence and he got an order for fifteen units. And pretty soon, thirty units. And pretty soon, fifty units. That's what started Patterson Steel. He said, "I never looked back."

JE: So that would have been in about 19...?

SP: 1920. December 1920 they started the Patterson Steel. He and his older brother, A. B. Patterson. After a few years the younger brother, Parker, graduated from college and they asked him to come and join them. So there were three Patterson brothers running the Patterson Steel Company.

The older brother passed away unexpectedly early on. My dad was the next in line. Became the president of Patterson Steel.

That company grew, during the war years there were four hundred employees. One of the largest jobs that he had at that time was building the bomber plant here in Tulsa. Or, actually, doing the steel framework.

The building was a mile long and it was such a big project and they were in such a hurry to get it done they divided it up. Four different companies took sections of it.

My brother and I would work summers in the steel plant, out in the plant.

One of the things they did was not only fabricate the steel but they would erect it or put it in place. And they got a job taking down some buildings that they had built for some of the oil companies and moving them to a new oil field.

So Ed and I worked a couple of summers on the erection crews. Places like West Texas and Oklahoma City. These were gasoline plants that my dad had been involved in. And they were called sectional buildings. They could take them down in sections, wall sections and panels, load them on a truck, and redirect them at a new location.

Both of us did some work in the shop. I had gone to the University of Oklahoma and graduated as a civil engineer, and my work was in the drafting, we called the drawing room, working on shop drawings. Everything that went into the shop to be fabricated had been pre-engineered and there were shop drawings to make. It was a great family organization.

My dad, who was called Nate, or N. R., was a great person to work for. He gave each one of us a responsibility, a separate responsibility in the operation. And he says, "Now, I'm available if you need the help."

The traditional thing was we had lunch every Friday noon, and that was sort of like a junior board member meeting. We'd go up to the Tulsa Club and discuss what each one of us was doing or what things were going on.

My brother, Ed, headed up a section of the company that dealt with selling steel. They called it a service center to other companies. There were probably several hundred small companies in Tulsa at that time that were fabricating pieces and parts.

Wheatley Pump and Valve was one of the customers. GASO Pump and Burner.

We were called a steel warehouse. Plain steel, we'd cut the steel, we'd roll it, we'd do the first operation for, I think, at least three hundred small companies in Tulsa. Some of them weren't so small. National Tank Company was probably our biggest customer.

I remember some of the building that we got involved in. The Tulsa Club building was a steel frame building. We were the only steel fabricator in the area at that time. And a lot of the downtown buildings, the schools, the churches, the Boston Avenue Church, First Methodist Church, First Presbyterian Church. All the steel framework came out of Patterson Steel.

My Uncle Parker was great at, as you drove around town, telling you who the architect was, who the contractor was, what year it was built. It was amazing.

One of the really nice things they did when ORU, Oral Roberts University got under way, Cecil Stanfield was the architect on that early project. And the Prayer Tower was one of the more difficult things that we ever fabricated and put up. As you recall, the base of that

building comes down to a narrow base, and then it's got the areas that extend out. The wells on that building were so critical that we x-rayed ever well as the building was put up.

Normally on a structural project, they're over-designed anyway, and they never X-ray. The connections and everything are three or four times as strong as they needed to be but that building was so critical because of that narrow base and the wide overhang.

We did a lot of the early buildings for Oral Roberts. It was amazing—he paid cash. It was so amazing. Quite often you're building a project and it's a bank loan or sometimes on public projects the payments come a little late. But we did the building down on South Main Street, it was one of his early projects. And it was cash on the barrelhead. If he didn't have the cash he would wait 'till he got the cash.

Chapter 03 - 3:08

Education

John Erling: Let's go back then to you. Your family came here and then you were born in 1921.

Sid Patterson: 1921. The company got started at December 1920 and I was born on January 1, 1921. That was kind of a milestone, was that's how old the company was.

JE: You had siblings?

SP: Just the brother, Ed, the older brother. That was my dad's reason for relocating in Tulsa, getting out of the small oil field boon towns.

JE: Then you went to elementary school?

SP: We lived up on North Denver and we had a choice of going to three schools. And the parents selected Osage School because we could walk there and stay on the sidewalk all the way. Instead of going to Emerson, you'd have to cross a couple of busy streets. Or there was another school down there around the base of Reservoir Hill.

So we went to Osage, which is not there anymore. It's probably where the interchange on the Gilcrease Expressway is.

JE: Okay.

SP: And then on later the junior high was Roosevelt Junior High. And then both of us went to Central.

JE: So you were in Central about 19...?

SP: Graduated in '38, class of '38 from Central.

At Roosevelt I got interested in journalism and they had a great journalism teacher over there, Dorothy Knappenberger, I can remember her name. It was really an English class, a super English class where we studied writing and the journalism.

And I was editor at one time of the *Roosevelt Record*.

Interesting thing happened to me. I was in the glee club over there. The music teacher was noticing that I was squinting. He'd write something on the blackboard and I had to sit on the front row or something. And he wrote a note home to my parents. It says: "Get this boy's eyes tested. I think he needs glasses."

Sure enough, I did. And I went back to school and Roosevelt's in Owen Park. You look out the windows there and there's beautiful trees across the street. I said, with the glasses on, "I can see those leaves!" They'd been a green blur before.

JE: You went on to college from Cental?

SP: We had an interesting visit to New England. My brother's senior year, it would be my sophomore year, we went to my mother's twenty-fifth college reunion at North Hampton, New Hampshire. And while there we'd travel up the Connecticut River to New Hampshire, and saw Dartmouth College.

My brother, Ed, was a senior that year and he said, "That's where I think I would like to go to school."

So he enrolled there and then two years later I went to Dartmouth. Two years at Dartmouth and then I decided to change courses and went to the University of Oklahoma.

I was going to be a lawyer at the time I went to Dartmouth, and I decided that engineering was my forte. And the University of Oklahoma has a real fine civil engineering school that I matriculated in and graduated from. With a BS in CE.

Chapter 04 - 1:22

The Depression

John Erling: Let's go back. You would have only been eight years old but the Depression.

Do you remember anything else about—

Sid Patterson: I sure do. Yes. We were skimping along. My dad, I guess, had somebody build a home on North Denver. And I can remember such things as there was some bonus for collecting the wrappers off of oranges. I can remember collecting all these orange wrappers. I don't remember what the bonus was.

For ten cents we could go to the movie. And my brother and I had roller skates, and one Saturday we decided we would skate down to the movie. I think it was on 1st Street or 2nd Street. We actually skated—that'd be over a mile—down to see a ten-cent movie.

While we were in junior high, or maybe it was high school, we had a winter horror. We had ice on the street where we actually ice skated from North Denver over to Owen

Park. He was driving at this time, and we could get a bunch of kids and go out and find a little ponds.

One of them was over here at Parthenia, the YWCA park, which is now the Presbyterian Camp Loughridge. The ice was heavy enough where we played hockey on the ice on Parthenia. That only lasted for a few weeks until it melted again.

Chapter 05 - 2:40

Downtown Tulsa

John Erling: What are your thoughts about downtown Tulsa at that time? It was a vibrant time, wasn't it?

Sid Patterson: It really was. There at Central High School, cattycornered across street was a grocery store. Bob Wills and his Country Playboys were playing, I forgot how often it was, but we'd sneak out of school and go cattycornered across where the grocery store was to hear Bob Wills.

Crown Drugstore was down on 4th and Main, on the corner next to the Majestic Theater. And they had a contest. People would write in less than fifty words why you liked Crown Drugstore.

And I wrote one of the winning entries. The prize was a car. You got a Ford automobile. I sent the entry in in my mother's name because I was underage. And so she won. They gave us the car.

JE: You were in high school?

SP: I was in high school.

JE: You graduated in '38 so it could have been—

SP: It could have been '35. Yeah.

JE: '35? That you won a 1935—

SP: And I couldn't even get out of school to see the car presented 'cause I had to stay in school and study.

JE: A 1935 or 1936 Ford.

SP: Right.

JE: Did they keep it for you so that when you were able to drive it was your car?

SP: Actually kept it for a couple of years and we sold it. I still didn't get to drive it.

Later on, when Ed and I were both at Dartmouth—to get to Dartmouth you rode a train, there was no air service in those days. And it was a long ride. You went from Tulsa to St. Louis to Chicago to somewhere in the New York area, and then up to Vermont. Vermont being across the river.

We convinced our dad that rather than pay that rail fair, which we did for the first year, we could put that money in a car and drive it. The two of us could go together. And, of course, we were coming home for Christmas and we were coming home for spring break. So there were three round trips a year. And the rail fare, that about equaled out the cost of the car.

And we had to put a heater in it. Cars didn't come with heaters in those days. It was an extra.

JE: What brand of car was that?

SP: It was a Ford two-door. It was the first model that they had where they had the Ford V8. It was a streamlined-looking body. Had the sloping rear end. Spare tire hanging out on the rear.

And Ed and I, in order to pay for the upkeep of the car we took a laundry route up at the college, where we went from dorm to dorm, picking up bundles of laundry, then delivering it when it came back.

JE: So that would have been a car that would have been around—

SP: That would have been in '40s.

JE: Early '40s?

SP: The early '40s.

Chapter 06 - 2:08

World War II

John Erling: What is your remembrance of World War II?

Sid Patterson: I was at OU at the time. And the Sunday that Pearl Harbor came on I was in the fraternity house. Most of the fellows in college in those days were in ROTC. A couple of these fellows in the fraternity house started marching around like they had a gun on their shoulder and said, "We're in the army now."

Unfortunately, I didn't get in the army. I served by working out at the Clinton-Sherman Naval Air Station in the construction of the station. I was in civil engineering and I got a job out there in a surveying, being the instrument man on building this airfield.

JE: That was a civilian job?

SP: That was a civilian job.

JE: So was that in lieu of military service?

SP: Yes.

JE: Or did you work that out with the military?

SP: I was 4F.

JE: Okay.

SP: Later on I joined the Army Corps of Engineers and worked on the Tulsa Bomber plant. Had a surveying job.

JE: Where was that bomber plant?

SP: It was the Douglas plant. Actually, the Douglas plant had already been built and they had come up with a program, I think the army was fighting in Africa, and they were building the B-24. They were customizing the planes for the particular theater they were in. And they decided they could get the planes built quicker and faster if they built one particular model.

And then they had another plant, and that's the plant I worked on, it was the modification plant. They modified the plane, the B-24, after it was assembled, and then they'd add the armor, the various equipment.

They had a gun range out there. They'd file the guns into this pile of dirt.

That was an interesting job watching that building being built and being on the instrument party.

JE: How long did you perform that job?

SP: Oh—

JE: Through the war years?

SP: Yes. I got back to the steel company eventually.

I was talking to somebody the other day. They've opened up this war museum in New Orleans, which was sponsored by the people that built the landing craft. I can say I've been down there. It's a fabulous museum of World War II.

Chapter 07 - 10:34

Public Service

John Erling: Let's bring you up to your time of public service. Tell us what led up to that.

Sid Patterson: After the war, the young fellows in Tulsa, a lot of them got active in the Jaycees. At one time we had about six hundred members of the Tulsa Jaycees.

In a way, I think we were more active on the civic improvements. There was a big push to improve the parks, improve city planning.

There were quite a few young architects. Dave Murray is one I remember. We got in active in a civic improvement committee that was trying to get the city fathers to do some good things like expressways, parks.

Lundy, Roy Lundy was the mayor at this time. Mr. Lundy was probably in his seventies or so. He had a young city attorney Bob Davidson. He said, "Bob, you know some of these young fellows. Let's get some young fellows on the city boards."

Some of the city boards, like the Planning Commission or the Park Board, had the original appointees that were appointed back in the '20s, still serving.

So Bob, I guess, came to the Jaycees and said, "Who are some of these fellows who are active?"

I got appointed to the City Planning Commission under the age of thirty. At City Planning Commission we had a problem in that there was no authority outside the city, and the city limits were very small at that time. And all the mistakes were being made outside the city.

So they created a County Planning Commission, which was separate from the City, and they decided on the County Planning Commission they should have some members from the City Planning Commission. And Roy Deaton and I were selected to also serve on the County Planning Commission.

A little later on when Clancy Warren was mayor, Clancy was a young mayor. Most of the city officials back in those days were retired people. It was considered a part-time job, it wasn't as strenuous or as demanding as today.

Clancy Warren was mayor and the street commissioner was serving his third term. Dean Foster was his name. He was a brilliant engineer and had done a lot of preplanning and had given the city some good advice. He ran for office and he was in the hospital and he got 85 percent of the vote and didn't campaign.

In those days, you had a Commissioner of Water and Sewer, a Commissioner of Finance, Commissioner of Streets and Public Properties, Commissioner of Fire and Police, four commissioners and the mayor. So there was a vacancy. The mayor had the power to nominate but he had to confirm with the majority of the commission.

The commission was divided. He'd dominate somebody, one fellow would second it, and the other two vote against it. This went on for several months and finally, somebody said, "Mayor, you've got to solve this problem." I don't think they could even pay the bills, they couldn't agree. He said, "You've got to solve it."

"Well, how do I do this?"

He had recommended or tried to appoint people who had some political background. Somebody said, "Well, you've got to find somebody neutral, somebody that is not identified with either party, and maybe that'll sell. Who's this young fellow over on the Planning Commission? Maybe we can get him to serve in the streets commissioner position."

So I was asked, and my dad had historically been against ever serving in public office. Because we were selling steel to schools or to cities or something. He said, "We could give

them the steel and then still feel like there was some skullduggery going on.” So he didn’t want to be involved. He had been asked to serve on the school board several times and he would turn them down.

So I turned down Clancy Warren.

Unbeknownst to me, the Chamber of Commerce people went to my dad and said, “We’d like to see you.”

He said, “Sure.” He said, “Well, I don’t want to have any problem with the newspapers.”

They said, “Well, we’ll ask Norris Henthorne and we’ll ask Mr. Jones.” Particularly Jenk Jones.

I had gotten acquainted with them in some Chamber of Commerce work. He said, “I’d like to see that young man on the board.”

So they said, “We’ll lay off, we won’t give him any trouble.”

So I was interviewed by Clancy for about an hour. And I wanted to do this because he was trying to bring the city up to date with modern computer equipment and everything.

He had a city treasurer who had worked for Douglas Aircraft, bringing the IBM equipment to Douglas. And he wanted to put all this together.

It was at this time the city was still doing some things by pen and ink. I think taxes were entered into a ledger by pen and ink. The water bills were addressed with an addressograph plate.

So I just wanted the experience of seeing the city change over to modern business methods.

JE: This would have been then about what year?

SP: This was 1952, ’51 or ’52.

JE: Right.

SP: So Dad said, “Okay.” After a week or so, “Yeah, that’ll be all right.”

Clancy wanted me to come down and he wanted to explain what his program was. I spent an hour with Clancy. I had my hand on the doorknob and on my way out and I said, “Oh by the way, I’m a registered Democrat.” And he was a Republican.

He said, “I’m the titular head of the Republican party.” And that just wouldn’t do. He said, “Why don’t you go down and change your registration and I’ll wait a few days before I bring your name up.”

And so I did.

In those days I think a lot of people had registered Democrat who, at that time, felt like they could improve the Democratic party by being active in the party. Because we were a one-party state at the time.

There were a lot of people that you might say had Republican tendencies that were actually registered Democrat.

So, I went down and changed. And would you believe a reporter for the *Tulsa World* didn't even know a thing about this, just guessed that this was going to happen.

One of the commissioners that was at odds with the mayor was the water commissioner Gladaver McCoughlin. It happened that Gladaver and my Uncle Parker played bridge together. So Gladaver heard that Patterson was going to be nominated. He calls Parker Patterson and says, "What sort of a guy is this nephew of yours?"

He said, "Well, I'll vote for him." So that's how he got confirmed.

And the idea was that I'd just spend the two years, get this experience, and then back to the steel business. And since it was a part-time job, Clancy said, "All I need you to do is be here on Tuesdays and Fridays when the commission meets." He said, "You've got a pretty good superintendent in the street department, a good secretary, they can take care of things."

So the two years were up. Both newspapers I think didn't like this controversy, this stalemate that had been going on. And they kind of informed the mayor and all the commissioners that, "We don't want to see you again."

And the Republicans drafted L. C. Clark to be their candidate for mayor. And he says, "Well, I don't want to have a controversial commission. Who can I get?" He knew the Pattersons, he knew me, and he said, "I like that young Patterson boy. I'd like to see him run."

Well, that meant I had to run for office.

And he picked John Henderson, who had retired from the FBI to be the police commissioner candidate. And John Thomas, who had just gotten out of the army. And his assignment in the army, he was in the Army of Occupation, and he was equivalent to the city manager of Frankfurt, Germany. So they figured he would make a good man, or a knowledgeable person. And he was.

So there are three of us. I was about thirty, thirty-one at the time. John Thomas was in his mid-thirties, and John Henderson had retired from the FBI. So the finance commissioner, his selection was C. B. Clothier, who had been the equivalent of the Treasurer of the Gulf Oil Operation in Tulsa at that time.

So it was a pretty good team. They call it the L. C. Clark team.

So I ran for election. It was a very compatible group.

Mr. Clark had been in the hardware business and the appliance business and *the* hardware store in Tulsa down on 1st Street. He was very businesslike. He said, "I want you fellows here before eight o'clock every morning and we'll go over things."

I remember going out to 31st and Utica. The people out there were complaining about the traffic lights or they couldn't get out of that Bren-Rose addition. So we got out there and monitor this thing, all five of us, some afternoon.

And another time, I remember going down to 31st and Riverside Drive. Just watching the traffic and figuring out what traffic engineer was trying to do down there.

And when I bring up traffic engineering I should mention that the fellow that preceded me, Dean Foster, is the fellow Tulsa can be responsible for for having a traffic engineering department. Prior to this time, the traffic was a police operation. The policemen thought you could put a policeman on the corner with a whistle and direct traffic.

Traffic engineering, the science of that, was a new science. And at that time, Yale University had *the* expert in this field. So due to Dean Foster we got a traffic engineer who had graduated from Yale to start traffic engineering in Tulsa.

And I can tell you, it's a real science. They're doing a whale of a job wiring up all this equipment. And one of the things they innovated here was putting the receptor in the pavement that control the change of lights. That was new. The traffic engineer, everybody thought it widened a lot of streets. And he said, "If we just widen the intersections it sits where the traffic backs up, we could save a lot of money. Instead of widening all the streets at one time, just fix the intersections.

This proved to be true. It's true today.

JE: But you were one of the youngest then to serve office in Tulsa.

SP: I believe that's—

JE: At thirty-one?

SP: Thirty-one, yeah.

Chapter 08 - 5:30

Downtown Street Planning

John Erling: Some street issues that you might remember that you had to deal with?

Sid Patterson: One of the things that we got involved in as commissioner of streets and public properties was that Tulsa had voted on having a civic center as a location for a new city hall and the new library and all. I was involved in the early days of the planning for the new civic center.

I was appointed chairman of the Civic Center Site Planning Committee. And we had on that committee some realtors and bankers. Roy Deaton I remember was one, Cleo Engle, who was Tulsa Federal Savings and Loan. They were all interested in how to develop the civic center. And this came to a head.

The county was building the County Courthouse and the architects, Black and West, came to the city. And they knew that the civic center was going to be developed some day. "We don't know which way to face the building, you tell us how this is going to happen?"

We got a committee, they call it the Tulsa Architectural League. Dave Murray, Murray McCune, Donald McCormick, I think a dozen or so architects all wanted to help plan

the new civic center. So they associated themselves together and called it the Tulsa Architectural League. And some interesting things happened.

A young fellow by the name of Bob Jones, a recent graduate in architecture from Notre Dame, was available and they brought him in to sort of coordinate the planning. And one of the early things was, "Where are you going to park these people?"

And they contacted the expert out of Yale. At that time there was a feeling in the city that parking wasn't the city's responsibility, that was a private enterprise thing and we were taking parking business away from private parking people.

The expert came down. And this was when they decided there was going to be a convention hall, library, police courts, all these buildings. And he took a map of the city downtown and said, "Okay, you're going to have so many cars coming to the hockey games. So many cars coming to the courthouse, and so forth." And he took a map of the downtown area and put cars on the street.

All we had at that time was parking in the street on the curb. And the big question was, "Are you going to have public parking? Or are you just going to ignore it?"

He had cars parked clear down to the railroad tracks, in one direction. I think we were figuring on seating four or five thou...I'm not sure what the seating was for the arena. Plus you had the other buildings. And you didn't have enough parking space in the whole downtown area to take care of all these cars. So that made us decide in this committee that there should be some off-street parking.

JE: So he made an example.

SP: Right. And that would have taken all the parking, probably clear over to Elgin and back to 11th and down to beyond 1st Street.

So this visual thing convinced everybody right away, "You've got to have some parking."

The next thing was, he said, "You ought to consolidate the area." The city had required six blocks, six square blocks with 5th Street in the middle, 6th to 4th Street and as far east as Houston. He showed us that we ought to close those streets and consolidate the area. There was a public meeting on closing 5th Street and consolidating the area.

John Mayo of the Mayo Hotel wanted 5th Street to be the main street to come by the hotel. And he was violently opposed to this.

I can remember the headline in the paper the next day after the meeting. "Mayo says that this would be for the birds, the bees, and the bums."

Well, 5th Street got closed and that area got consolidated. That was one of the big decisions.

And then the placing of the buildings. The convention center had been named for the mayor later on, the Maxwell Convention Center. It was the biggest building and it really took almost two blocks. The hotel interest wanted that convention center right on the corner of 4th and Denver.

The architect said, “No, that’s the biggest thing down here. It would block the entrance to the civic center. It should be to the west.”

So there was a little fight where to put the buildings. What you see now was the best solution. The library where it is, the police courts.

JE: So City Hall, how did that come into this? When that tower was built?

SP: They had decided on the location for City Hall. Murray Jones, Murray, Murray formed the firm and this fellow Jones that had been our advisor on the civic center plan had joined his firm. I think they did the City Hall and they did the Maxwell Convention Center.

The library came in and the police courts. Joe Coleman was one of the architects on some of those projects. Charlie Warren was the library expert. He associated with the librarian, got to be library experts. And they later on did library planning for towns in Texas.

Chapter 09 - 4:10

Annexation—Water Issues

Sid Patterson: Anyway, that was one of the things while I was street commissioner in the '50s.

The other thing I got involved in was annexation. I'd chaired an annexation committee. And about that time the city limits, over as far south as 41st Street, the development in the town was taking part south and east of Tulsa. A lot of the houses are actually being built outside the city. These people needed water and they needed fire protection.

The name of the game was, “Let’s build outside the city so we can afford the city building codes. And then ask the city to annex us.” That caused some problems.

There was an area just south of the fairgrounds, it would be south of 21st Street and east of Harvard, the developer had put a two-inch water line in to serve a whole bunch of houses up there. And these were young families with babies, new yards, and landscaping.

Along came summer and they'd turn on the faucet at five o'clock and it'd be drip, drip, drip. And they had been annexed to the city after the development.

This was the next mayor, Mayor L. C. Clark. We had a real crisis in our water supply and L. C. was smart enough to bring in Bill Holloway, they're the Holloway Engineering Firm. Holloway had designed the Spavinaw Dam and the early water supply system for Tulsa in the '20s. And then they didn't use them from then on, and they just kept extending lines and extending lines without some good advice. And brought in Bill Holloway.

And the first thing he did, he says, “We've got to put an elevated tank there at the fairgrounds. You pump this water up at night and then take it out in the daytime.” Puts an elevated tank over here on the Tulsa Hills. In about a year's time he had Tulsa back.

Oh, one of the things was getting water down here from Spavinaw. The original Spavinaw line was a gravity-flow. And he had designed this gravity-flow line. He said, "We need to put some pressure on that line."

So they put in some pump stations and they could increase the quantity. And then they built a dual-line. They fit two lines now coming from Spavinaw.

I think later on we got another lake feeding water into Tulsa. And then I think an emergency thing, the original lines from Spavinaw cross the Grand River. They actually go under the river. They worked out an arrangement with the Grand River Dam Authority where they can bring in water from the Grand River.

So we've got two other sources now.

But it was amazing how quickly that was solved by putting in the elevated tanks. Another one was out at 71st and Sheraton. That was a real crisis. You talking about people storming City Hall? When they couldn't get water to bathe their babies and water their lawns and they had all this landscaping dying.

John Erling: So they would literally come in groups to City Hall?

SP: Oh yes, yes. And they found the whole area out there was served with a two-inch line. If it had been inside the city when it was developed it would have been an eight-inch line. This is one of the advantages of annexing these areas before they're developed.

JE: So how was the two-inch line problem solved?

SP: I think they put in some more line.

We had another problem with people building outside the city. Their street construction was substandard. There was one addition out there where the city standard at that time was six inches of concrete. And I think today it ought to be eight inches with a base. And they're running buses over this slab that is undersized. The pavement was crumbling.

So annexation was a big thing in those days. Even later on, the next time I was on the commission we were into annexation.

JE: You served from?

SP: '52 to '56. And then again in the '70—

JE: Yeah. But was that a one-term? '52—

SP: I filled out—

JE: Filled out—

SP: ...the term and then I was elected to the second term.

JE: Until 1956?

SP: Right.

Chapter 10 – 3:57**Toilet Tax**

John Erling: But then something happened because, I understand, of the toilet tax.

Sid Patterson: The Clark administration, before it went in people in the water department were saying there's a real problem in the income. The steady stream of income. In those days, the cities in Oklahoma were not authorized to tax. Some of the smaller towns either owned the electrical distribution or they owned the water distribution and they can sell.

The only income Tulsa had was selling water. And they didn't want to run the price of water up to the disadvantage of industry.

So they came up with, "If you can sell the water going into a house, why can't you tax the water coming out of the house?" That's where the sewer tax idea came up.

And there were two things that put us out of office. And they called it a toilet tax. They had a better name for it legally but the utility board came up with this idea of the sewer service charge. And that helped, that got the city out of the hole.

As I said, the cities in Oklahoma were not able to tax like the sales tax that's in now. It took the legislature some years later to change it. So the only income they had was from selling water or selling sewer service.

Several million dollars came in from water. The next highest item on the income stream was parking meters. And it was infinitesimal, under a hundred thousand. Oh I'm sure it was probably more like fifty thousand dollars. So the cities were in a real straitjacket from the standpoint of income.

But later on Oklahoma City and Tulsa and some of the cities convinced the legislature to give cities the power to levy taxes. And primarily it is the sales tax.

JE: But that toilet tax, as they called it, that led to your defeat.

SP: Yes.

JE: And the Democrats unseated the Republicans.

SP: Right.

JE: It wasn't only you, then, that was—

SP: The whole team.

JE: It was the whole team lost?

SP: Yeah. Some political analyst said, "It's real easy. You shouldn't be identified as the L. C. Clark team. It's a lot easier to defeat a team than it is individuals. And that proved to be true.

One of the other things that Democrats used in their campaign, the brick pit next to Roosevelt Junior High or next to Owen Park a couple of kids had been drowned. This brick company had abandoned the operation for years. And the big hole in the ground

filled with water. I think the water was so deep when they finally pumped it out they found a steam shovel down in the bottom of the hole.

People, even in our engineering department, says, "There's not enough dirt to fill that hole. We'll never fill that hole."

They went to court and declared the brick pit a nuisance, thinking that the owner would do something about it.

Well, all he did was put a fence around it. So the hole in the ground was still there. It was a huge hole. And there were engineers who said, "That's so many thousands, millions cubic feet, they'll never fill it."

Would you believe they started building downtown buildings like the City Service building. They dug foundations and they wanted some close in place to dump it. Cincinnati Avenue going north went through a hill and they cut part of the hill down and dumped it in the brick pit. And I think it was just in a couple years they had that filled and leveled off.

They never could get the owners to do what needed to be done. So the city bought it. So the claim was, "Why they bought a hole in the ground? They're taking our good money and going out there and buying a hole in the ground."

Chapter 11 - 9:20

Tulsa Flooding

Sid Patterson: So back to the steel company for—

John Erling: You went back to the steel company. But then again, in the '70s, you came back as street commissioner. How did that come about?

SP: Bob LaFortune, must have been in the '60s, ran for street commission. I talked to him frequently about the position. As a matter of fact, he had his secretary, the secretary I had, Ann Davis, was a wonderful, knowledgeable person. Then he decided to run for mayor and he got Joe Coleman, who is an architect, to run for street commissioner. And he was a good one.

Joe wanted to do what we finally got done, and that is, to plant trees in the medians on these multilane streets. And he was almost ready to cry when they paved over the median on Memorial between 31st and 41st.

So I was pretty close to Joe. And near the end of his term he had declared that he didn't think he'd run. And I went up to talk to him about it. "I think, Joe, you're doing a good job. You ought to stay."

Well, he was in an architectural firm that had partners and he said, "I got to talk to my partners." He says, "They're looking down their nose at the time I've taken away from the office."

In those days, it was more of a full-time job than it was in the '50s. So I went up to talk to him one day and he said, "Well, I'll give you an answer in a month or so."

I went back to see what the answer was and he said, "I can't do it." And then he said, "Why don't you do it? You used to be Street Commissioner."

And at that time I was available. Our company merged with another company and I had worked for the Anixter Company, the company that acquired Patterson Steel. And said, "Well, I'll give it a try."

I ran in '72, and was elected in '72, and then again in '74.

JE: So then—

SP: And those were the years of the flood. Joe Coleman, when he left office, they'd had a flood, I guess the so-called hundred-year flood on Mango Creek. And they decided that his term was the year of the flood.

Would you believe? It flooded again in two years. And then it flooded again in two more years?

One of the reasons, of course, was the rainstorm but more parking lots, more roofs, more houses had been built in the watershed. And the water runs off faster when you pave parking lots and rooftops. So every flood was higher.

Quite a few people said, "Well, that's not the year of floods, you know. That's not going to happen again for a hundred years."

Well, it happened two years later. And it was always around Memorial Day. And they called it the Memorial Day Flood.

JE: So what areas would be flooded?

SP: Upstream end of Mingo Creek is Woodland Hills Shopping Center. And all the water from there on down comes into Mingo Creek. And, of course, there's Joe Creek and there's other creeks.

JE: Wasn't there a time, then, when commissioners, you'd kind of span out across the city and you'd check the flood levels?

SP: When a rainstorm came several of us would be in our cars at different places to see how high the water was coming. They'd had a flood on the Joe Creek that flooded an area around 61st and Lewis. We had worked with the Corps of Engineers to knock down fences and flooded in an area that's called Garden Park, part of it. We were working closely with the Corps of Engineers and some money had been earmarked to improve Joe Creek.

I get a call from a fellow at the Corps of Engineers. He read in the paper that we'd earmarked a couple of millions dollars to widen or fix Joe Creek. He says, "That design that we did was ten years old. And we just flew the area again. There's been so much new development." He said, "The Congress had legislated or something that they were to only design these things for existing conditions."

So when they designed an improvement to Joe Creek it was for the conditions existing in say, 1965. He said it was ten years earlier. And that money that had been set aside to improve Joe Creek wouldn't have been adequate. He says, "Would you slow that down? We're going to redo this thing and maybe in a couple of months we'll know what we need to do on Joe Creek."

Well, a project that was gonna cost around two million dollars on those old plans, I think, cost about six million dollars after they reevaluated. Because of the developments, the parking lots, the apartments, and all that were going to put that water in there faster, quicker.

And I had an interesting thing, the people that lived on Mingo Creek, there was a young fellow out there that was a University of Tulsa student. It's sort of a science project or something, he'd studied the problems on Mingo Creek, and they were having a neighborhood meeting in a Presbyterian church near Memorial. And during the meeting a storm came up, a heavy rainstorm, and a bunch of the people left and said, "We'd better go home and see how that creek is rising."

And sure enough, that same night, right at the time where they're having this meeting with the Corps people and other people on, "What do we need to do?"

They had another flood on Mingo Creek. They had a map that shows the rainfall across the city. And at one of these storms the map showed eight inches of rain in the Woodland Hills area. As you went across the city the number of inches fell off. And you got to the Arkansas River it was zero.

So they had a storm cloud, literally, that was hanging over Mingo Creek that produced eight inches and it graduated down to almost zero by the time you got to the Arkansas River.

JE: Huh. Didn't you bring a new concept to this flood control known as Storm Water Detention?

SP: Right. There were disbelievers in this idea. I was a member of a group called the American Public Works Association, and they were having seminars and annual meeting on urban flooding.

I went to this meeting in San Francisco, and there were people there from Los Angeles and that area, telling about the same thing that was happening in Tulsa as they kept developing rural in the Los Angeles area. They said, "We've already widened the creeks as wide as we can get them. We got to stop this water and store it before it gets to the creek."

And there was an expert, the young fellow who had been a city engineer in the St. Louis area at one time, and then later on was up in the Chicago area, that proposed this idea of detention. Holding the water somewhere and not having it all rush into the stream at one time.

Harold Miller was our City Engineer and he was very skeptical on how to do this. I got Harold to go out there with me and we saw what other cities were having to do.

This fellow from St. Louis/Chicago situation had written a book. A detailed, technical book on how to do it. As a matter of fact, we brought him to Tulsa to speak to the Planning Commission. And I was so undone. There were developers and developer lawyers at the Planning Commission that took up all the time. I mean, he was just here for this one day. The meeting started probably at two o'clock in the afternoon.

At five o'clock that afternoon they still hadn't given him a chance to talk about how to stop the floods.

JE: Well, the developers were upset.

SP: Very definitely.

JE: Tell us why they were upset.

SP: Well, at one time, the city considered a moratorium on development until we got this flooding thing under control. I'm not sure how far that moratorium went but they finally were anxious to know more about it. It takes some of the land out of development.

The nice thing in those days was the creeks, that's where the trees were growing was down by the creek banks. And that was a high-priced property down there where the trees were. And a lot of people were building homes or developers were building homes in areas that were flood-prone.

JE: But you brought the expert to town. The developers took most of the time that day. Was he able to present his story the next day?

SP: No.

JE: He ultimately did do the stone water detention.

SP: I think we could credit J. D. Metcalf, was an engineer. He was a street commissioner. J. D. was two years later following me and he bit the bullet and he got it done.

JE: So—

SP: We got it started but he, uh—

JE: J. D. Metcalf was able to see the stone water detention.

SP: As a matter of fact, they got some funds earmarked for drainage. And that's how they've acquired this land and excavated it. Tulsa became a model, really, on how to handle urban flooding—with the detention. You just couldn't make the creeks big enough.

Chapter 12 - 4:30
Roads and Sidewalks

John Erling: During your time there in '72-'74, you dealt with the inter-dispersal loop?

Sid Patterson: Yes. That was great. The office that I had acquired in the new City Hall was in a corner that faced west and south. I could observe the construction going on on that part of the inter-dispersal loop just from the office.

I remember taking a trip to I-244 going east from downtown. That hadn't been opened yet, was about ready to open. The engineers invited Harold Miller, the City Engineer, and myself, and a newspaper reporter to go view what was about to be opened. And I remember Harold Miller congratulating. He said, "This is the first time you've built a highway in Tulsa that wasn't obsolete the day it was opened."

JE: When you were Street Commissioner '72 to '74, there were some attempts at passing some street bond issues and they failed.

SP: Very disappointing. There's a requirement that the street bonds pass by 60 percent. Other things, school bonds, most anything else it's 50 percent plus one. These bond issues, one of them failed to get 60 percent by about 100 votes. It put the city back.

I remember one of the bond issues involved the West Tulsa Expressway. A fellow by the name of Guy Hall owned some motels or something on old Highway 66. And he was violently against anything that would bypass his motels. And he ran for street commissioner and was the next Street Commissioner.

I remember going to some of those West Tulsa meetings. They would hardly let anybody speak for the projects. Once he got in office and they built the 51st Street bridge and the traffic started being diverted from West Tulsa, he just flipped over the other way and he couldn't get that West Tulsa section built quick enough.

When that bond issue was defeated the first time the highway department already had plans for Tulsa. And they had plans for a project in Oklahoma City. And the money that would have been spent in Tulsa was spent on the project in Oklahoma City. That takes you around the east side of Oklahoma City. That failed by around 100 votes of getting 60 percent.

You know, it was a shame. It was a majority who was 59.5 percent or something.

JE: Did that actually set us back quite a bit?

SP: It did. And it cost more.

I remember going to a meeting where we were trying to get a bond issue to buy the right-of-way for the Tisdale Expressway. Beautiful project now, but the city had to buy the right-of-way and the state wouldn't provide some of the construction funds. I went to a

meeting on the north side, and they were those north-siders that always say, “You haven’t done anything for us.” You know. “We’re against this bond issue.”

And I said, “The first item, the biggest item on this street section was for the right-of-way to buy what was called then the Gilcrease, and now the Tisdale.” And I asked this fellow that so violently against it, I said, “Where do you live?”

He says, “Well, I live at Apache and Cincinnata.”

And I said, “Well, that would just go right near your home. You know, you’d have this great access.”

He said, “Well, I wouldn’t use it.”

I mean, he was so agin her. Well, he’s using it today.

JE: Yep. Another issue? A bond issue?

SP: Yeah, uh, sidewalks. Up until the Bob LaFortune days the sidewalks in the city were paid for by the budding property owners. That had to be an assessment to the property owners. And he felt it was kind of unfair. The people that fronted on a major street would bear that whole expense. And he thought it should be city-wide. Or people from all around would be using these sidewalks.

So, in the bond issue we established a policy that every time they do a bond issue project on a major street that it includes sidewalks. And that’s been a boon. How can you have a good transportation system or a bus system or something like that if there’s no way for people to get to the bus stops. Amazing, even when they do an intersection improvement they do the sidewalks. That was a big plus, I think.

JE: Yep.

Chapter 13 - 23:05

Up With Trees

John Erling: Up With Trees. How did that get started?

Sid Patterson: There was a group, I think it formed when Joe Coleman was Street Commissioner, of people trying to decide how to beautify the expressways. There was some anti feeling about the highways because they were ugly.

Some of us had had the good fortune to see the Merritt Parkway in Connecticut, and the thruways in New York, and the parkways in California. And we thought, “Well, by golly, we can do it here.”

We had a group kind of studying how to do this. I remember they even drew up some very attractive sketches of how to do the proposed Riverside improvement. It was just kind of a study group.

And then one day, late in my term, I got a call—you get a lot of unfavorable calls when you start cutting down trees here. We were widening some of these old streets. Out on 51st Street, just the other side of Skelly Bypass. There had been a beautiful farm there where a fellow had planted trees on almost five feet off the edge of an old oil dirt county road. And we were making it four lanes. And we had to cut down these probably seventy-five- to a hundred-year-old oak trees. There wasn't anybody getting up in the trees like I've seen sometimes. But I got a lot of complaint calls.

And I got one about four thirty in the afternoon and I was about tired of getting complaint calls. And this one fellow, young fellow called. I kind of said, "Oh, this must be another complaint call."

And he says, "No, I'm asking you what's the city doing about replacing those trees?"

And I had to admit that the city had no program to even plant trees. This committee had been active for a year or two trying to get something started. We went to the mayor, Bob LaFortune, and said, "The city's got to start planting some trees where we're taking down these trees."

And he said, "Well, Sid, you're on the city commission and you know the city's financial condition as well as anybody."

This was before the sales tax income had started coming in. We didn't have enough money to fill the potholes.

Bob says, "Go out and see what you can do in a private way. The city will help you all it can but don't expect money."

I understood. We started, we got fifty dollars, we'd go out and plant a tree.

And then, I met a young fellow, he was a landscape architect. In fact, I had known him over at OSU. He said, "How's Up With Trees growing? I'd like to help."

I said, "You would?" I said, "Boy, we need your help."

The city had just rebuilt the 21st Street bridge, which crosses the Arkansas. Harold Miller, the City Engineer says, "There's a little land down there. We ought to plant some trees. If you'll come up with a plan, but I've got to see a plan."

This fellow's name was Randy Heckenkemper. He and a group had formed a landscape firm that does primarily golf courses called Planning Design Group.

We'd asked the Park Department to give us a plan. Delay, delay, delay. And six months later the City Engineer says, "You'd better get something done or this money's going to disappear."

Randy had us a plan in two weeks' time. The city loved it. They wanted to pay him.

He said, "No, this is my civic contribution." And they've done most of our plans since. Some of them are generic plans, it's the same plan for one intersection as another intersection.

So we went to the public. Tulsa Rotary Club wanted to plant some trees, beautify the entrance to the city, the airport. They gave us three thousand dollars, and I figured it's thirty trees.

Another young fellow called me, a fellow who worked for Southwood Nursery, and I had known him in the past, both as a construction engineer and as a landscape person.

JE: Is that Joel Shulte?

SP: Shulte's company, it was Chris Ferris down there. He said, "Joel likes what you're doing and he said I should volunteer and help you." You know, he could show us how to plant trees.

I said, "Well, yeah, you can come out and help us plant trees."

He said, "Well, I'll do that too but what I had in mind is I buy the trees for Southwood." He goes out to different tree farms and identifies and locates the trees. He said, "We could buy those for Up With Trees at our cost."

Instead of thirty trees we planted sixty trees because we were getting them at their cost. And we've been getting them at various nurseries that way ever since. Through Southwood and through Jerry Windland at Windland Nursery.

Let me tell you about this deal. Southwood is a great nursery and they've got beautiful merchandize, but they don't grow anything except maybe the pansies. So these trees are shipped in from somewhere. And at that time, we were going to the tree farms and it would take us two or three days to pick up the trees, just to have the trees to plant Saturday.

We found Windland Nursery, who was a local grower, that we'd bring in and say, "Pine trees from Oregon." He had the same pine trees growing here in Tulsa. And they're better because they're acclimated. We can tell them what we want and he'll deliver them to the hole on the planting day.

We were spending more days gathering trees from over in the eastern Oklahoma or up north of town than we were planting trees. So he has supplied a lot of the trees. They're locally grown, and he delivers them right to the project the day you want them.

JE: Hmm. Let's go back to that young man who called you. His name?

SP: Elliot Howe.

JE: And how old was he?

SP: He was a high school student, seventeen.

JE: Seventeen years old?

SP: And he just loved trees. He became a volunteer, unusual fellow. He later on became a doctor, but he knew more about trees than anybody in town. And he was going out and obtaining trees and planting them himself. He planted some over there at the Education Service Center because they needed some trees over there. And he got their permission and—

JE: Is he still living today?

SP: He's still living today and I'm not sure where. He at one time was in Atlanta.

JE: How did you come up with the name Up With Trees?

SP: When I was Street Commissioner we had an intern. He came up with a name so long and we can't remember it. It was something Environmental this and that, and there was about five words. Phyllis Edmonds, the vice president of Sooner Federal, was quite a PR person. He said, "You've got to have a snappier name than that. How about Up With Trees?"

And that became our name. Phyllis Edmonds, you probably remember her. She invented, when Sooner Federal came up with a million dollar piggy bank. She was a great gal. She was one of our presidents of Up With Trees later on. Quite a dynamo.

JE: What year was it formed?

SP: We incorporated in '75, so it was prior to that time. Probably '74.

JE: That you got the phone call?

SP: Yeah, I was still in office—

JE: Yeah.

SP: ...when I got the phone call. I served until '76. We were using that other funny name. I can't say enough about Phyllis Edmonds. She was quite a PR person. She kept a scrapbook. She had all the clippings. She was always promoting, and her thing was she didn't want the credit, she wanted the prison to get it or an individual to get it. She did a lot in developing leadership within Up With Trees.

JE: As you know, whatever project there is there's always opposition. Weren't there those who said, "You can't plant trees in Oklahoma?"

SP: Oh my god, yes, yeah, early on. "You can't plant trees in Oklahoma and expect them to survive these hot, dry summers."

The challenge became planting trees that were drought-resistant and disease-hardy, or the other way around, I guess. We noticed cities that hotter temperatures and longer droughts than Tulsa did were planting trees: Phoenix, Arizona, Sacramento, California, they had great tree programs. Sacramento was on the desert side of California and they've got a great tree program out there. And the difference is water!

When they do a highway construction project in Arizona, at least in the Phoenix area, they have put waterlines or water taps along with the highway, which is like .001 percent of the cost of the construction project.

When they did the widening and beautification of Yale next to LaFortune Park the city did put water in those medians. And then on 71st Street they have water in the medians.

Early on, we didn't have water trucks. One of the fellows had a pickup truck with a couple of barrels in it and a bucket. And we'd water the trees out at the airport out of a pickup truck.

One of the things we should mention about Up With Trees, our program's different than other cities. Tom Crewson was the municipal judge back in the '70s. And about

the time we got our planting program underway he came to me and said, "I'm starting a program where the misdemeanants have got to do community service." He said, "Up to now we've just been charging them a fine." He says, "I want them to make a contribution to the city and I think this is a lot different than, say, a policeman requiring something, you know. A nonprofit doing it is a lot different."

We wouldn't be where we are today if it hadn't been for the manpower of these misdemeanants.

And I didn't know what a misdemeanor was. I said, "What are they? Bank robbers? Are they murderers? What are they?" I knew they'd come through the jail.

He says, "No, these are minor infractions." He explained they were young fellows, usually speeding tickets or not wearing a helmet. He says, "You'll know some of the kids, and you'll know their parents."

And sure enough, I've had some.

Later on it developed, I think we get even more adult people with misdemeanors. I think they get a smaller fine.

JE: Either no fine or a reduced fine.

SP: Yeah. We've had some pretty talented people, and some of them become volunteers.

One thing I'd say about them, particularly the young fellows, they're proud of what they're doing. They're not resentful. It's not like they were forced to do something because they got caught. They say, "Well, I want to bring my girlfriend," or "I want to show my mother what I've done out here." So they take kind of an ownership in what they do.

JE: Did that program come to an end?

SP: No it's still going.

JE: Oh it's still going?

SP: Yes. Uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: Here in 2009?

SP: We've got two things we're doing now. At one time it was strictly misdemeanors, then occasionally a Boy Scout troop or a school group. We had one fellow who's been with us almost ten years, college graduate, worked in the Peace Corps, his name is Scott Parent. He supervises the planting of the trees and he gives a misdemeanants a training course before they are allowed to plant a tree. And he's there making sure the holes are dug properly and that sort of thing.

This year, with this re-green program we have another supervisor who's not using misdemeanants, he's using volunteers. School groups, neighborhood groups, church groups. On the re-green program what's there Kathy Taylor has really been the spearhead of. It's a different crew and a different projects.

JE: And that all came about because of the ice storm that we had.

SP: Thank God for ice storm, in a way, yeah. No, I shouldn't say that. We were lucky in that our trees are younger and I think we picked varieties that are stronger. We're planting a pear tree, a lot of people are down on the Bradford pear because it's a weak tree. It was the first flowering pear tree that was on the market.

And I remember on 15th Street north of the fairgrounds, years ago the park department planted Bradford pear. They grew out real wide and they were pruned by the trucks and the buses going by. And the ice and the wind. They finally took them out.

But there are improved varieties of the pear that Cleveland Select is a variety that the city planted on South Yale. And they're upright, they're strong, they're beautiful in the flowering season and they're pretty, red leaves in the fall, shiny, green leaves in the summer. They're the ideal tree.

JE: What other variety did you plant?

SP: Several varieties. We plant oaks, the pin oak is the variety we don't plant because it has the drooping branches. But there's an upright variety called Nuttall or Shumard. There's a new variety, fairly new to the market, Lacebark elms. It's a lot different than the American elm or the Chinese elm. It's a strong, strong tree, and it's drought-hardy.

The two trees that they recommend are Pistache and the Lacebark elm as being the hardiest trees. And there's some varieties of oak that are very good.

On Riverside Drive and again on cross street on Yale Avenue from LaFortune Park there are the Cleveland Select pear. There's other names for it. We alternated four ash, four pears, four ask, four pears. And then we got down further south we introduced the Pistache tree as one of the four. They're opposite the casino and down toward 96.

After the ice storm I only saw one branch broken. So that says something.

JE: They were younger and hardier.

SP: They were younger and hardier.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). You're a founder of Up With Trees.

SP: I'd say one of the founders. Probably the one that's been with it the longest.

One of the persons that spurred us on was Alene Rose Carter. Alene Rose Carter was also interested in planting wildflowers on the highways. And she went down and got some good information on wildflowers from Ladybird Johnson.

And there was a couple of ladies that I mentioned, Phyllis Edmonds. When they were trying to get wildflower seeds they were actually out with hand-push lawnmowers, mowing these seed pods off of the wildflowers. That was their only source of seeds until Ladybird and some other people got some people into producing the seeds, the wildflower seeds. You can now buy them but they're very expensive and they don't work too well where there's heavy grass. The seeds have got to get down into the soil.

The highway department has bought two seed planters that they use all over the state that kind of scratches the soil and distributes the seed. And then they're a boom that comes behind that covers up the seeds. All in one operation.

JE: Hmm. You give credit to these others as founders but you're the one who stayed with the program.

SP: Very definitely.

JE: And become most associated with it. You stayed with it because it was a good thing to do? It was a good time of your life to do that?

SP: That and early on these women kept pushing me, in a nice way.

You know, it's hard to imagine now but these women are probably in their fifties out there with a shovel, helping in a token way, I think, in planting.

JE: Here we are in 2009, and Up With Trees started in '74. Any estimate how many trees that might have been planted by now?

SP: Well over twenty thousand. Over a thousand just this year, already, well over a thousand.

JE: I would imagine early on trees did die from lack of water.

SP: This Chris Ferris that I mentioned earlier was instrumental early on, the techniques and so forth. He told us one time that our survival rate is much higher than what the nurseries had because we're taking care of them. The nursery plants a tree in your yard or somebody's yard, it's dependent upon a person taking care of it. And about half the people plant it and don't. Or they overdo it, they over-water it.

Anyway, our survival rate early on was about 99 percent.

JE: It would be hard to imagine Tulsa without Up With Trees.

SP: It sure made a difference. I'm amazed and I'm pleased as you go down some of the highways where we've planted trees and the trees have been there ten or fifteen or twenty years.

Driving down 75 through West Tulsa next to the rail yards, that was a Rotary tree planting where they planted one tree for every member. They had 130 members come and participate in about, I think, four different weekends planting 420 trees. Half of them were on 75 north of downtown and the other half are on 75, out there opposite Goodwill Industries and opposite the Burlington Northern train yards.

JE: Then there were those that would have fun with Up With Trees and they'd say—

SP: How—

JE: "How does this happen? You build Up With Tree signs made out of wood." What was your answer to that?

SP: There are four or five good reasons why we make them out of wood. It's a renewable resource. The option would be steel or plastic.

David Averill came up with a story on this years ago.

JE: In *Tulsa World*?

SP: In *Tulsa World* editor. A third reason was at that time the lumber was free. Mill Creek Lumber Company, James Dunn loved Up With Trees and we were using a redwood early on and had a sign company make them. He said that redwood is expensive and doesn't last. He said, "You ought to be making these signs out of treated yellow pine." He said, "A fence post of treated yellow pine will last forty years, because it's treated."

Those signs are rallid. We've had some great woodworkers that have volunteered. One of the great volunteers we had made templates of all the letters, different sizes. And they'd lay these templates out around the router.

Early on we didn't have this system. There was a fellow with Amoco that would print these out on the computer. Then you'd take a center punch and punch little holes to get the outline of the letter. And then you'd hand do it. This fellow came along and said, "You need these templates, I'll make them."

The first signs we put out were out on the highways and you're going sixty miles an hour. That's another story. Each one of these signs was different.

And a fellow came to me and said, "You ought to standardize." And he was a woodworker, he was the project manager for an air-conditioning company. Woodworking was his hobby. He had us standardize the Up With Trees, all the same every time.

You're driving down the highway sixty to seventy, eighty miles an hour, these have got to be readable. So the signs were bigger. Then we had that standard sign and we put it on Riverside Drive where people are driving slower and spaces were more limited. And we found out that big sign, well, it wasn't in tune, so we're making a smaller sign now for Riverside Drive.

And another person came along and said, "You need to stain that wood." And if you'll notice the newer signs are stained. And it's also a preservative, it makes the sign last longer.

JE: Can you think of any other names, company names or anybody else?

SP: I was going to mention two fellows. The fellow named Norm Osbornson who's principle owner of the Aon Company, maker of rooftop air-conditioning equipment and heaters. He was a Rotarian and participated in the first Rotary planting. He was working away showing people how to plant trees, and said, "When this is over I want to show you where I'd like to see you plant some trees."

Turns out that his younger years he worked on a tree farm. He's now, of course, an engineer, a great engineer and running the Aon Company. He has sponsored a tree site every year since 1990. And he has come out and helped plant early on. Then he said, "Well, I've got to quit. My company's working overtime and I need to be there Saturdays."

Then there was Jack Maxwell. Jack had a personnel company called Staff Mark. He would always come up with a great location. And I think he was a sponsor for every year for ten years. He wanted to be in all parts of the city. You know, he'd pick out a site over

on 169. He's retired and so he's not sponsoring now, but he's still interested. He lives down in Bixby. And I think we've done some signs down there.

JE: There must have been a time when the concept of a sign being sponsored by someone, which encouraged people to give because they liked to see family names or whatever.

SP: I'm glad you mentioned that. The Rotary Club did this project. Randy Heckencamper said, "You ought to plant Spectaculars." Before the signs. He suggested the sign and the sponsor's name and he called it a Spectacular.

So we planted this Rotary sign at the airport. We didn't have an office, a phone number, or anything at that time. People started calling the Rotary Club and said, "How do you get to do that?"

A fellow had a site picked out and it was, of course, near his business or near the part of town he frequented. So early on the sign was our marketing, and still is. People who want a sign in a certain area in businesses out by 51st and Broken Arrow. Or where they live, you know.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

SP: One couple, this is where we turn off when we go home.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

SP: And we still get those requests. Somebody, he's a banker and he has an interest in TU. He wanted a sign there where you turn off there to go to Utica. If you were going to a football game or a basketball game.

We've had some really good requests. Now some of them have been personal, you know, it's not always companies.

JE: Oh it's in memory of family members.

SP: Right.

JE: That certainly has helped sustain, but then above and beyond that there have been major contributions, financially.

SP: Had to be. One of our problems was maintaining the site. There's a lot of effort goes into weed-eating, or cleaning up the area, watering, or mulching. After a while we found that the one-time payment didn't sustain the maintenance. So we're now requiring or asking an annual maintenance fee. And if they don't want to continue maintaining the sign then we'll turn the site over to somebody else and start again.

Chapter 14 - 9:38**Patterson Statue**

John Erling: They placed a statue in your honor at 33rd and Riverside.

Sid Patterson: Actually about 28th, it's north of 31st on Riverside. Beautiful site. I was so pleased with that.

Len Eaton, who was the first chairman of the River Parks Authority came up with the idea of raising the money for the statue. And you saw the smaller model? That was given to me the twenty-fifth year. I think the banquet was out at Gilcrease Museum. And they said at the time they would like to do the larger statue. And sure enough, it happened.

JE: And now after all these years there's a new facility for Up With Trees, 11th and Boston.

SP: You know, our first effort we had shovels and lawnmowers and I had to have a place to store them. There was, do you believe, a closet in the underground parking at City Hall that they gave us. It wasn't any bigger than fifteen feet by fifteen feet. We outgrew that.

And the John Knox Presbyterian Church had a basement, they let the Boy Scouts store their camping equipment in one half of it and we had the other half, for a number of years. So we headquartered at John Knox. Then we outgrew that.

And we were able to get an industrial area over near 44th off of Mingo. That property that had an office and a warehouse and a little parking space for the trucks.

This year, we were so fortunate Anna America came aboard as our executive director. She thought we needed a better place. The restroom facilities for volunteers wasn't very nice and we were crowded. They hunted and they hunted and they came up with this place at 1102 South Boston. It was a vacant building and they said it hadn't been occupied for ten years.

And it was sort of Automotive Road years ago. There was a Packard dealer and a Dodge dealer and Fred Jones Ford was down there in the area. So we don't know exactly who the building was built for but it was built in the '20s or earlier. Has a trazel floor, a beautiful floor in the office part. They completely gutted the inside and reconfigured it.

And then next to it is a garage where we can make the signs and store the trucks and the equipment.

And a fellow named Ron Walker, who is retired from American Airlines has taken over what I used to do in the landscape part. Deciding where the trees are planted. We'd take little colored flags out and put flags where the volunteers are going to dig holes. Ron has done a beautiful job of fixing up this garage part to store the equipment. It's a model.

JE: Yeah.

SP: One of the things Anna has said about this, our former location we were in an industrial area, not too accessible. Since they're downtown now more people are coming. For

instance, we have trees to give away, those little seedlings. There's a constant flow of people coming down picking up seedlings. It's more convenient for the volunteers when we have meetings.

And recently they've started a training group for Citizen Foresters. Something we've always wanted to do but didn't have the facility or the teachers to put this on. But they've started a Citizen Forestry program where a person gives, I think it's forty hours of intensive training. And then they have to donate back forty hours of volunteer work or as much as they want to do.

So the new office serves as a classroom for that group.

JE: You have donated hundreds and hundreds of hours, Saturdays—

SP: I tell people it's been my golf.

JE: You don't golf?

SP: Well, I gave up golf.

JE: And you took this project on. I know there are things that are in the week but it's mainly a Saturday function, isn't it? Of actually planting, so you gave up many Saturdays to do it.

SP: Saturdays and some Sundays.

JE: Is that right?

SP: The nice preacher at John Knox Church, we had kind of a joke going cause we were there Sunday taking out equipment. He says, "I'll give you a special dispensation because you're doing God's work."

JE: Well, you are to be congratulated for that, that's for sure. And you've driven that program for all of us and for the generations to come.

What's that quote somebody said? "Why should we plant a seed of a tree for those who will never see." The obvious answer is, "It's for those generations to come."

SP: You'll never sit under the shade of the tree you plant.

JE: Right.

SP: The shade is for future generations.

JE: Yeah.

SP: And that's the message somewhat of that statue in River Parks. There's a young fellow along with the one that's supposed to be Sid, um, encouraging him to go plant a tree.

JE: Yeah. So here you have lived three lives: your professional life in the steel business.

SP: Right.

JE: Your life of service to the city.

SP: Political, yeah.

JE: And Up With Trees.

SP: That's right, three distinct phases.

JE: And it's hard for you to put one over the other, perhaps? Or can you?

SP: It was kind of integrated, yeah.

JE: But Up With Trees, private citizens, you didn't take money from government.

SP: Nope.

JE: At all?

SP: Probably put some money in too.

JE: Yourself? Personally you put in? It's all driven by citizens, hard work, manual labor, and financial contribution.

SP: At our Arbor Day banquet, actually just a week ago, one of the persons that's been on our board just for a few years, said, "Aren't you proud of what you created? Did you ever think it would amount to this?"

I'm amazed myself that it has.

One thing I got to say is people like trees. You get into other things, there's Roland Collins, we've gotten so much support. One of the things that I've noticed is that people that move to Tulsa from other areas are impressed, amazed, you know. They thought they were coming to a treeless area. We've got a lot of support from people that lived in Michigan, Wisconsin, New England. They appreciate what it's done for Tulsa.

JE: Well, we're fortunate because the eastern part of the state was blessed with trees.

SP: Oh yeah.

JE: Much more so than the western part. We had a nice jump start on that.

SP: Thank goodness.

JE: Yeah. All those careers, how would you like to be remembered?

SP: Well, I think the tree part has probably been the outstanding part. At least publicly and visually it's the thing.

JE: It's got to make you feel good when you drive down the street and you're seeing those trees, those trees, how does that make you feel?

SP: Just overjoyed, really. A lot of the trees are old enough now where they make a difference.

An interesting story, we had these landscape plans, and I had a friend who's actually living here now in Inverness Village. He was a volunteer and a geologist. His job was to take the plans that the planning design group had drawn and stake the trees.

Well, the Highway Department at that time wanted us to space the trees so they could mow between them. So they had to be twenty-five to thirty feet apart. He was using a scale—the plan had, you know, one inch equals some hundred feet or something like that. It turns out he was using the wrong scale and the trees are a lot closer together than the Highway Department had specified. But they never noticed, and it made them more beautiful planting. Instead of spread out they're all grouped and they look great.

But after we had planted the trees he said, "Oh you know, I used the wrong scale."

We found a great difference between the Highway Department requirements and the turnpike requirements. If you'll notice on the turnpike, Creek Turnpike, they planted the

trees real close together and they look good. They'll plant maybe twenty-five pine trees in a group. The State Highway Department people wanted them spaced apart. I mean, they're just kind of here and there and somewhere. But to me they look a lot better on the Creek Turnpike in their groupings.

JE: Well, I want to thank you. This has been very fascinating.

SP: Well, it's been an honor to have you come out.

JE: Thank you. As you know, this will be placed on a website and students, the general public at large will be able to click on Voices of Oklahoma, click on your name or Up With Trees, and then they'll know the history of Up With Trees forever because of this technology.

SP: Very good. I think it's a wonderful thing to do.

In case you'd like to know, I was responsible for planting forty trees out here Tuesday.

JE: Here?

SP: Here at Inverness.

JE: We should say, this is where our conversation is and your place in Inverness Village.

SP: Inverness Village.

JE: So you planted forty trees out here?

SP: Right.

JE: Great.

SP: I want to drive you around if you've got a minute.

JE: Sure.

SP: And show you something nice. We've got good support out here. A fellow I mentioned to you, Bob Lenocker, that was the inspiration has been responsible for a little waterfall. There's a creek out here and they're making a beautiful thing out of the creek, planting dogwoods and it's just gorgeous.

JE: Um-hmm (agreement).

Chapter 15 - 0:33

Conclusion

Announcer: (music) This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time on *VoicesofOklahoma.com*.