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Joe Guidry (JG): This is Joe Guidry on March 2nd, interviewing Jan Smith in her beautiful in Lutz on Lake Saddle.

Jan Smith (JS): Saddleback.

JG: Saddleback. So, let me ask you first, Jan, when were you born? Where were you born and raised?

JS: I was born in Williamsburg, Pennsylvania, home of the little league world series. And I lived there until I was about 10 or 11, and my family moved to Michigan for two years. And then, my mother just hated the cold, so we moved to Florida, and I grew up on the east coast of Florida in Melbourne Beach.

JG: Moved to Melbourne. What brought you to Tampa?

JS: I came to the University of South Florida to go to school.

JG: To go to school? What was your major?

JS: Accounting.

JG: Okay. And that brought you into your great interest in the environment, I'm sure. (both laugh)

JS: Actually, I think my interest in the environment really piqued—there was a time when my father was on the governing board of the South Florida Water Management District¹.

JG: Really?

JS: And I really felt that the whole reason they were, at this time, channelizing the Kissimmee River was to drain the pastures for the farmers. And I got into a few tiffs with my father over that. And then, I didn't do much until we moved here; and, as somebody said to me one time, the next big environmentalist in Hillsborough County is the last person who moved to a lake. (both laugh) And so, I didn't realize, when we bought this house, that the house is in the ring of cypress trees, which tells you this was a swamp and this house should not have been built where it is. And I didn't know that, across the street, was Lake Park, which is the well field for Section 21 for St. Petersburg.

And, in the early '70s, I got involved with the Lutz Civic Association² over the drawdown³ of all the lakes out here. There was a time, in the late '60s before we moved here, where they pumped so much water out of Section 21, that this lake ended up with a little bit of water over there in that corner, and some on the other side; otherwise, it was just pretty much dry. And it totally dried Round Lake, which is to the west of us. And they brought a fire hose across Dale Mabry [Highway], which, at the time, was a two-lane road, and they filled up Round Lake. But they didn't do anything, and so, there was about an eight- or nine-year period where I spent my life going to Tampa Bay Water, which was—what was the name of that?

JG: Southwest Florida—

JS:—water management district. Then—

JG: No, West Coast Regional Water Supply⁴.

¹South Florida Water Management District is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts, covering 16 counties from Orlando to the Florida Keys.

²The Lutz Civic Association, formed in 1943, is dedicated to promoting, pursuing, and advocating for programs that improve the area's civic life.

³In surface water hydrology, drawdown refers to the lowering of the water level in a man-made reservoir, such as a lake or pond. In subsurface (underground) hydrogeology, drawdown is the reduction in liquid pressure observed at a well in an aquifer, which typically occurs as a result of pumping a well. Smith makes references to both types of drawdowns throughout the interview.

JS: West Coast regional. So I went to all of those meetings and would raise a little cane about the drawdown. And then, one day, somebody directed me to a book, I think it was CH2M HILL⁵, not sure. And they had done a study, and nobody had put it out for the public to see; it was about how they turned the well field off, and they checked all of the wells that are around here—the monitoring wells for SWFWMD⁶—and then they turned the pumps back on, and they saw that the pumping really did—and they sort of hid that from everybody for years and years.

JG: Pinellas denied—Jeff Greene(??) denied—

JS: Yeah, yeah, that it had anything to do with it. So now, you know, with the advent of all that information coming out, they are only allowed to pump a certain amount over here, and they hadn't done much pumping at all, after they had the sink hole. So that was, sort of, the beginning of me really being concerned about the environment and what we were doing to it.

JG: So you've lived here since you went to USF?

JS: No. When I graduated from USF, I worked at Tampa General [Hospital] as an Accountant I for them. And then Earl was doing his residency at St. Christopher's [Hospital for Children] in Philadelphia, so we went back up there for two years. Then, we were in the Navy in Pensacola for two years. What was so nice about that is, Earl had originally wanted to live in Pennsylvania, and I found living around Philadelphia very depressing. The weather was nice for two months out of the year. Because, when we were in Pensacola, you could be outside every day, just like here. And so, one day, he just said, "Would you like to move to Florida?" I said, "I'll be packed and ready to go tomorrow morning." And so, we came. And we came back to Tampa because Earl knew a lot of physicians here, from being an intern here.

JG: So you came to stay in what year?

JS: We came back here in 1972.

⁴The West Coast Regional Water Supply Authority was created in 1998 to deliver drinking water in an environmentally sound, cost-effective, and reliable manner. The agency has since been replaced by Tampa Bay Water, a regional wholesale drinking water utility that services the Tampa Bay area.

⁵CH2M HILL is a global engineering company that provides consulting, construction, design, and operations services to both private and public sector institutions.

⁶SWFWMD stands for Southwest Florida Water Management District, a regional agency of Southwest Florida responsible for planning and regulating the consumption of water resources, the use and protection of wetlands, and other water-related activities.

JG: Seventy-two. So you've been here, pretty much—?

JS: And so, we've been here ever since.

JG: So you've seen a lot of changes in Hillsborough County. Have you lived here since '72?

JS: No, we bought this house in 1976. We lived out in Town and Country in Morganwoods Park, where they had all the beautiful oak trees and everything. It was gorgeous.

JG: So you have seen a lot of changes in the natural area.

JS: Yes. Oh, yes.

JG: Did that kind of drive you to go for some of the things you—?

JS: Yeah, um, I think one of the things that really drove me into the issues was seeing how the development community would come out here and just propose a development—and most of the county commissioners, at that time, lived within the city, even the at-large members—and they were making decisions that affected us. I remember going to hearings that would last until one o'clock in the morning because they would just let people ramble on, and people would get angry and point their fingers at the county commissioners because of the development that they were putting out here. I was real concerned about the public issue, public safety of your health, with all the septic tanks and wells. And so, I did a lot of studying Flora Mae Wellings⁷, who was an epidemiologist, and reading all of her stuff and understanding how rain percs⁸ [sic] through the soils. As a result, if you have a place where you have a lot of orange groves and sandy soils that perc [sic] well, when you put a septic tank in there, it doesn't let the water soak through and clean it; it just flushes it through in heavy rains. And then it's all down in the groundwater, everybody in Lutz. I think your subdivision of Winter Oak—?

JG: It does, and I have seen—

⁷Dr. Flora Mae Wellings was a renowned Florida epidemiologist who directed the State Epidemiology Research Center for 18 years and whose work is regarded as being instrumental in finding solutions to many of Florida's environmental public health issues.

⁸Smith is referring to percolation, which, in environmental science, refers to the downward movement of water within soil.

JS: Doesn't have—(both speaking at same time; inaudible)—yeah, you're not in the subdivision. You're near it.

JG: Yeah.

JS: And that was, there were two issues there that they were going to put water in. And that's the only way that they could get the Lutz Civic Association to support it. And what was the other issue with them? I know there were two issues. Oh, the price of homes. I got into an argument with Pick Talley⁹ over affordable housing and what it really meant. The county would just let the developers come out to Lutz, get cheap land, and build a whole bunch of houses, and sell them cheaply. And so, what was happening is that we were having subdivisions with 100, 200 homes all in well and septic tank. And so, I think the first one that came in, that was better planned, was Glen Cross' Crystal Lake, up near Sunset. When he started that, I said, "If you're going to put in a single deep well, you've got to have a second well," because, if lightning hits the well, it's down; those people have no water. So I argued with him, and he agreed to put in a second well to have the redundancy.

But Lutz did not have any public water supply, per se. And so, then, what was happening is [that the] developers were putting in a single well for 50 homes on quarter-acre lots. And, you know, the quarter-acre lots came about back when they used to call it the Pork Chop Counties¹⁰, when they were trying to put homes in for migrant workers, and they wanted to put as many homes per acre as they could. So the state legislature made quarter-acre lot on a well and septic tank an acceptable thing. I don't even think a three-acre lot is the right size for a well and septic tank. Part of my reason for that is my own experience here. We had three acres; we put one well down; and, not long after that well went down, it was polluted, e-coli. And we had a chlorinator on it. So then we put a second well down, and we went down almost 300 feet. And we have great water now, but we do have to run a chlorinator.

And so, this neighborhood where I live, really, probably had a lot to do with me getting involved with all of this because this whole circle around these lakes, we're all on well and septic tank. And yet, everything around us is now on public water and public sewer. And it was a big fight, over here, for the orange grove at Crenshaw and Van Dyke because they were going to put those houses on well and septic tank. And I said, "All the flow is this way through to Lake Park because of the suction of the wells." So I said, "We'll all be drinking brown water and be polluted. We'll have a mess." But the county's—I had a meeting with Stacy White¹¹, and they're

⁹Pick Talley was the head of the Pinellas County Utilities Department from 1991 until his retirement in 2008.

¹⁰Smith is referring to a group of counties represented by 20 conservative Florida legislators who came to be known as the Pork Chop Gang. The legislators were primarily active between the 1930s and 1970s, and their efforts were largely centered around maintaining segregation in Florida.

¹¹Stacy White is a Florida politician who was originally elected to serve in the Hillsborough County Commission in 2014. Since then, he has held many leadership positions within the Hillsborough County Commission.

looking at maybe putting public water in here because they know we're in a little bit of danger, health-wise.

JG: Living out here in this beautiful area from the '70s, you saw all these changes; you saw the development. So, when you were here, this was mostly grove, pasture, and wilderness?

JS: Yes.

JG: And all that's been turned into subdivisions and commercial. And, usually, when they came in here, the developers, they would, like, build up and fill in the wetlands. Is that what you saw?

JS: Yes. We saw a lot of filling in of wetlands. And, many times, the developers could create their own hardship. You know, they would lay out their parcel of land and what they were going to do with it, and they would make it so that the entrance had to go through a cypress swamp, when they could've put it somewhere else. But they wouldn't. They'd put it through the cypress swamp, and then the county would let them take it out. And, for a long time, the counties and a lot of other places in Florida were under the impression that they could remake cypress domes¹², and I think they've found out, really, that it doesn't work. Mother nature did it, but these engineers have not been able to really make it so [that] if you take out all these towering cypress trees here, you can put small ones in somewhere else, and it'll be fine. It isn't fine. It hasn't worked.

JG: Well, as you were getting involved in these, it originally was on the water issues?

JS: Yes, yes.

JG: Who were some of the other people? What were some of the key issues? And who were some of the other people that were helping you?

JS: A lot of my neighbors here. And then we put together a coalition of Northwest Hillsborough civic associations that went all the way from Town and Country, down to Carrollwood, Bay Lake, down there, Lake Magdalene, which you know is further south, and all the way up into Keystone because you had these well fields. You had Section 21, you had the Cosme-Odesa Well Field, and then you had the one up here at Cypress Creek. And each one of those well fields' drawdown happened within a mile of each well. So, as the wells are sort of dispersed around the land, then you have a mile out from each well; pretty soon, you've got this

¹²A cypress dome is a type of swamp, typically dominated by pond cypress. The trees at the center of the swamp grow higher than the trees at the edge, which forms a dome-like shape of treetops when viewed from a distance.

overlapping of all these cones of depression for the wells. And so, it was easy to get a big coalition. And that's how I got involved with the Lutz Civic Association, because I went to them and told them what was happening here on this lake and the damage to people's homes and their trees and their environment. Home damage was significant.

This house is now on piers all the way around it. They go down 57 to 67 feet, and they came in and leveled the house because we had so much settlement from the drawdown. If you think about it, you're in a cypress dome. If I'd have known we shouldn't have cypress trees in my front yard, I might not have bought the house. But you have all that vegetation that, for years and years, just decays. And, as it decays and stays wet, it functions like a sponge, and everything stays full and in place. But, when you have the pumping and the drawdown of the water table¹³, all of that vegetation that had been laying there for hundreds of years is now rotting, decaying, drying out, and becoming like dust. And then everything just kind of shrunk up, so we had a lot of issues. But getting involved with the Lutz Civic Association, we were pretty rowdy. I don't know if you—I remember being called an obstructionist and everything else in the press, for objecting to the way developers were doing sites. And you know I was sued over the De Rossi(??) property.

JG: Go over that again. I do vaguely remember that.

JS: (laughs) It was an issue, to me, of the environment but, mostly, of the water issues out here. I spoke before the governor and cabinet on the Sierra Club's challenge to the county's growth management plan, when they turned on the density out here to two or three or four units to the acre. And so, I spoke up there. But, at the time, I was on the planning commission, but I was not an officer. Or, at least, I wasn't chairman. I just said that the damage to the environment and to people's homes and the fact that we really needed to preserve a lot of this area because we were the water source. Northwest Hillsborough has the greatest amount of recharge¹⁴, 13 inches a year to the aquifer, of any other place in Hillsborough County. And so, there really was a need to protect these water sources—not only in Hillsborough, but in Pinellas and Pasco because that's where people get their drinking water, other than the rivers.

And so, I spoke up there, and the De Rossis didn't do anything. And then, they came in with their plan for a shopping center that was going to be as big, if not bigger, than International Plaza. And so, I spoke about the economics of that and building all this impervious surface and how the flow of water comes from that way, over here to the well fields. And I'm not—who knows why the board eventually voted against it? But they did. I got a call from Rick Harcrow¹⁵ one day, and he said, "Jan, run down to the county development department and get a copy of the

¹³The water table, sometimes called groundwater table, is the upper level of an underground surface in which the soil and/or rocks are permanently saturated with water.

¹⁴Groundwater recharge is the process through which surface water moves downward to become groundwater; this is the primary method through which water enters aquifers.

¹⁵Rick Harcrow is a prominent Tampa Bay area real estate developer. He currently serves as the regional president of GreenPointe Communities, LLC.

recommendation on that site for the mall.” And I went down, and it was written by Steve Loose(??), and it was a recommendation for denial. And then, Rick called me back later and said, “Did you get the report?” And I said, “Yes,” and he said, “Good,” because, now, Gene Bolts(??) was directed by Fred Carl to override that report and put a report in, in favor of the—

JG: Fred did that?

JS: Fred did that. And Fred used to try to get me to go on—he wrote letters of recommendation for me to be on SWFWMD. He tried to talk me into running for county commissioner. But he thought—he didn’t have—he came out here and said, “We need the tax revenue. We need to have that approved.” And I said, “I can’t change my opinion. It’s based on the science I know and understand and what I think is right for this area.” Once they put the dog lake right off of the veterans here, it killed this area because they look at where the roads go as where the development goes. The county has never directed that. Had they directed where roads, water, and sewer went, they would’ve had better control of their growth. But, by letting the developers say where they were going to build, that put the county in that mess that we were in for years with leap-frog development, where it would go way out into the hinterlands of the county. And then they had to provide services, and they couldn’t afford to do it. So, at any rate, the De Rossis filed what’s a typical slap-suit against me for speaking—

JG: They were very aggressive.

JS: Yes. And one of the things I remember the most at the first deposition was Bob Merkel, and he handed me a letter that we got—Shabal and Colusa Trace(??), and all the neighbors around here and everybody. We never had trouble organization people. At any rate, the whole thing with Bob Merkel being the De Rossis’ attorney was that he was a criminal attorney, and I guess he thought I was a criminal, but I could never understand why they would pick him and not a land-use attorney. He didn’t know anything about the planning commission. He thought I had a paid position. He thought I had paid secretaries and all of this. And I explained to him, “No, I’m a volunteer.” He said, “I want your telephone logs.” I said, “I don’t keep telephone logs,” and he didn’t understand why.

Trying to tell him that the only time I listened to anybody—other than information I could gather from staff, from my own knowledge, from reading your editorials, whatever—was, I only listened in a public meeting, to these people. I didn’t call the developers. When Ron Weaver¹⁶ and his law firm would have Christmas parties, and they would invite; I wouldn’t go because it would look—I thought, even if nothing went on, it was a perception that I was in the attorney’s pocket or something. So he came with this letter, Merkel, one day, and he threw it down in front of me. And he said, “Is that your signature?” And I said, “Well, yes, sir. It looks like my signature.”

¹⁶Ron Weaver, a partner of the Stearns Weaver Miller law firm, is a prominent Tampa attorney specializing in development issues, environmental disputes, zoning, and land ownership and property acquisition.

And he said, “Isn’t it true that everything you have ever done in your public life is to prevent the De Rossis from building a shopping center on their property?” And I said, “No, that is not true.” I said, “Have you read the letter?” and the letter said what we would support up there. And what we would’ve supported was a high-rise garage, so that they didn’t have all of the paid parking, and that pervious surface that you could use with the blocks so that the water could go through. And we wanted them to do little boutique shops and, all around the wetlands, take advantage of the view of the wetlands and put pretty little shops and things there. And then build your center. But it could’ve been absolutely gorgeous, and they didn’t go for that. And so, they lost. And then Bob Merkel died, and then they had another attorney.

JG: Ends with an L, I think.

JS: Oh, jeez. And I got deposed by him. But, partway through, Jim Norman¹⁷, to his credit, asked the county to represent me because I had hired Ben Hill¹⁸, who used to live here on the lake, and I knew him. And the first question Ben asked me when the suit was filed was, did I ever go over there and try to burn down their houses? (both laugh) I said no; I didn’t do that. But, eventually, it went to the Supreme Court of Florida, and they lost. And they never did—and what they’re building now is about half of what they were approved for back then, so it’s better.

JG: Well, and they also—when you testified on behalf of the Sierra Club, the county lost that as well, didn’t they? I mean, they—

JS: The county had to bring the densities down.

JG: They compromised, you know what I mean? The Sierra Club ended up kind of prevailing in that one; they didn’t get everything they wanted.

JS: Yeah, but we did pretty well. We got the densities greatly reduced. And then, when I went on the planning commission, I asked Bob Hunter to write to SWFWMD and ask them to work with us on how to plan for growth in this area, so that we knew how to protect the water resource and the environment and still allow private property owners to develop their properties. I remember getting the letter back from the chair, and I’m not exactly sure if it was Pete Hubbell¹⁹ or who.

¹⁷Jim Norman is a former Republican member of the Florida State Senate, representing District 12 from 2010 to 2012. He also served on the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners from 1994 to 2006.

¹⁸Ben Hill, a founding shareholder of the Hill Ward Henderson law firm, is a prominent Tampa area litigator focused in the areas professional liability, products liability, and general commercial matters.

¹⁹Peter G. Hubbell, formerly the executive director of SWFWMD, is a prominent consultant and hydrologist whose work focuses on water resource planning.

But he wrote that he didn't need another agency telling them what to do. And yet, I wanted them to help us, so we didn't get it.

JG: Yeah, you know, talking about Merkel, it's interesting that Merkel was representing them because they were accused of bribing the commissioners, which he had taken over that.

JS: Yeah. It was all around, and while that suit was going on, I got a phone call from a woman one day. She said, "I can't tell you who I am or where I live. But I can tell you that I called the sheriffs a few times over low-flying helicopters dropping bails of marijuana in the property up there, and they burned my house." She said, "So I want you to be aware that these people can be very dangerous." Now, I have to assume what she told me was true. But the other thing is, when the suit was ongoing, Peter and Nick lived right up here, and they would shop at this Publix grocery store here, and they would see Bonnie Hoffman, who lives across the street, or Larry Padgett, who lived up north, near Sun Lake. And they would threaten him, "If you don't shut up, the same thing that's happening to Jan Smith will happen to you. We'll sue you too."

JG: Good grief.

JS: So they went big time. It was an experience.

JG: You don't hear anymore from them.

JS: No, no. In fact, one night, Earl and I were up here at the little sushi restaurant, and Peter came in and sat beside us, and I don't think he even recognized me. I recognized him because he had all those gold chains. He wears lots of jewels. But, you know, one of the things about growth out here, Joe; the shopping center where Publix is, they made it so all of the runoff went into a retention pond just behind the shopping center, and then it drains under Dale Mabry. When they took that big overpass that used to let the De Rossi's cows go from side to side, they took that down, and they ran the drainage over here. So it first comes into Crenshaw Lake and then into Saddleback Lake. And, you know, when you think about it, all of the stuff that washes onto pavement from your car, almost everything in it is a carcinogen, and all of that is washing into our lakes now. These lakes, when we moved here, this had the most beautiful sand bottom all over, just gorgeous and crystal clear; you could be out in the middle of the lake, and you could look down. Most of these lakes are only about eight feet deep; I imagine Lake Burrell is about that. And, when you see it now, the damage it's done to the bottom of the lake, and our fish all have tumors and stuff.

JG: Aw, man. Nothing you can do about that, right?

JS: No, no.

JG: But when did you decide that the county really needed to start buying the land instead of just regulating and putting the impetus behind ELAPP?

JS: Well, I was president of the Lutz Civic Association, and Jan Platt called and wanted to know if she could come out and speak to the people at the Lutz Civic Association about ELAPP. That was my first knowledge of it, and I thought it was such a fantastic idea, such a good idea, that I asked everybody that was at the meeting that day to empty their pockets and put a little money in the pot to help them to do that first campaign. And then, once the—I did help with the campaign a little bit, not a lot. I was working full time.

JG: At that point, where were you working now?

JS: I've always worked for Earl.

JG: Earl, after you did the TGH [Tampa General Hospital]—

JS: Yeah, yeah.

JG: That was when he was a prominent pediatrician in town.

JS: Yeah, yeah. So, you know, I worked the eight hours, and I had two little kids then. And so, I didn't have a lot of time, but I did what I could to help around that first round. Then Ed Radice²⁰ came to me when he was putting together the groups because I had worked with Ed a lot, up at Lutz, when we resurrected the Fourth of July parade with Beth Neville, who was the fire chief, and Carolyn Meeker. We just had a ball. We put the parade back in place; we started doing the fireworks; and then we did the Christmas celebrations and everything up there. We just had a ball. And then we would have our fights with the county over growth and lack of growth management. And so, Ed called me one day because he would always—any time I had a project out there, I'd say, "Can you get the grass mowed? Can we have some lights here?"

²⁰Ed Radice (1936 – 2015) led the Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department for 28 years. During his tenure, the once-small department expanded to contain over 80,000 acres of land, a feat largely credited to Radice's leadership. In 1999, the 138-acre Ed Radice Park, which contains five baseball fields and multiple softball and soccer fields, was established in his honor.

And he was just wonderful. So he asked me if I would agree to serve on the ELAPP general committee. And he told me how he thought he was going to handle that, and I said, “Oh, I’d love to do that.” And then, the next thing he did, let’s see, it was in—how many years has it been? Then he came and asked me to be on the Friends of the Parks board, which is a group that we just raise money to pay for things that they county budget can’t cover. Like, we raised money and paid for all of the playground equipment over at Lake Park; there’s a wonderful playground set over there. And we would scholarship children whose families couldn’t afford to pay the summer recreation programs and stuff.

They have to bring us documentation to prove that they don’t have the money; you know, if they get school lunches and stuff. But it’s a fun group. Roy Wilcox had been president of it for 25 years, I guess, and he passed away, and I should have been president, but I said, “I can’t take on something,” and Peter Fowler had started coming. And so, he is now the president of Friends of the Parks. I said, “I’ll stay as vice president as long as you want me, but I can’t handle that with the other things,” with ELAPP and working and all. So those two things, that’s how I really got to know Ed Radice and like him and work with him. So, when they decided to do the second ELAPP referendum, Ed and Jan—and I don’t remember who else—a couple of other people asked me if I would chair that campaign, so I did. And it was funny, I was chairing that campaign at the same time Joe Chillura²¹ was running for county commission.

JG: Against Jan?

JS: I don’t remember whether that one was against Jan or a different one. It could have been against Jan, but he wanted me to endorse him publicly. I think maybe it was a different seat. I can’t remember. At any rate, I told him; I said, “While I’m running this campaign, this ELAPP, I won’t take on anybody else’s campaign,” and I had already promised Jan that, at the end of the ELAPP campaign, I would help her with hers. Because we did ours, remember, the special election? We knew [that] if we waited until the regular election, we might not get passed, and we really had to do it when we did it. And it was fun. I went all over this county. I saw some of the most beautiful parks and places, you know, just gorgeous. And to think that that’s going to be here for people 100 years from now to enjoy because our generation had the forethought to protect it.

It was so much fun. I met so many different people, and so many people were so ready to help. And then the last campaign was the one I did with Jan and Bob, and I handled their calendars and stuff. It was a group of us, and we met—it was Heidi McCree, and Dick Eckinrod, and me, and Bob Martinez and a few other people, and we just got volunteers from all over, and we had different writers and, of course, you. And then, we had people from Evet Hammut(??) down in south county and Vicky Parsons and people that were willing to put out signs. And we did raise enough money to put out signs and things and posters in storefronts and letters in libraries.

²¹Joe Chillura is a Tampa Bay area politician who has served on the Tampa City Council, Hillsborough County Planning Commission, and Hollsborough County Commission.

I really, truly believe that, by getting Bob Martinez, say, in front of the rotary club in Downtown Tampa, that was really great, and getting him to speak at the Tampa Bay History Center, and he went down to south county and everywhere. Jan and I went to different places out here in the northwest and the south county. But I think the press that we got, particularly your editorials, it was just—the public really understands that they need drinking water, and they want it to be clean, and they want it to be safe. And so, they were great, you know?

JG: And that—I mean, you got over 70% of the—

JS: 79.5% of the voters voted in favor.

JG: And that was in a general election, not in the—

JS: Right, in 2000—

JG: And that was that Tea Party year.

JS: Yeah, it was the year the economy crashed, 2008. Things were going downhill—

JG: Was it 2008 or 2010? I thought it was 2010. Maybe it was. I know it was a year that you wouldn't have expected to do this.

JS: Well, and I'll never forget Jim Norman saying to me at the meeting, "Well, we don't want this thing to go to referendum and to have it fail." I remember looking at Jim and said, "I have no intentions of letting this fail," as if I could control the world. But he was mad at me over something. Jim and I had some real serious ups and downs.

JG: Me as well. But were there any special challenges, as you all adopted ELAPP as a program? Anything that you—?

JS: I think the most frustrating thing for us was that the first referendum was to raise the money and to pay as you go. The second one was that the county could levy up to a quarter of a mill. We always wanted them to levy the quarter of a mill; they didn't do it often. They very seldom levied

up to the quarter of a mill. The last referendum was just that the county would provide them funding. There isn't a separate millage²² to go to ELAPP.

JG: They still can levy the—

JS: Yes, yes. And you wrote an editorial. The headline of it was, "The County Should Find a Way to Fund ELAPP." And Mike Merrill²³, Mike and I sat down and talked so many times, about how to fund ELAPP and what to do. And, you know, he has been so good for this county commission, and he finally agreed; I invited him to an ELAPP meeting to speak about the budget and how it was handled. He came, and he talked about it, and I think the people on the general committee really understood what he was saying to us. And, at that point, he came up with the 15 million [dollars] that he would have budgeted for us. Now, we haven't been able to use a lot of that because, after 2008, when the economy slowly started picking up—and in the last year more so—people are less interested in selling to ELAPP.

One of the pieces that we want to get is down in south county, and it links two of our biggest preserves. It's not a very big parcel. Let me see, did I put something—? One-hundred-and-sixty-nine-acre parcel that would link the Little Upper Manatee River Preserve and the Manatee State Park. These two and this one, the 750-acre, triple creek in the Balm Boyette. And the developer that owns that little parcel is giving us a lot of grief, and he won't come in with the appraised sites. We've always used the appraisals as the outside numbers that we should buy for. And they wanted way more than the appraised value. I talked to Mike Merrill, and he said we could do that, but, once you do that, that sets a precedent; you would never be able to keep people with the appraised values of the land anymore.

So we haven't done it, and the developer hasn't done anything with the parcel yet, and we keep hoping that he'll come in. And one of the things that people can do is, if they have an appraisal of the property and they want so much money for it, there is a statute on the federal taxes that you can donate a percentage or all of it to another governmental agency or to a charitable organization and take a deduction for it. So we were hoping that this man would pay us what we want for it, and then, if he thinks there's a difference—and there may be now—that, that difference, he could take as a donation. The Williams Company worked out something like that on one of those big tracts in south county. In fact, I remember Jan Platt voting against it. I couldn't understand her for doing that, but they got that federal tax break, and she didn't think they should've gotten it. It's on the books, and there's the law!

JG: Jan can be very strong when—

²²A millage rate is the amount per 1,000 dollars used to calculate taxes on property.

²³Mike Merrill is currently the Hillsborough County Administrator.

JS: She wouldn't go with us. But we got the parcel because of the rest of the commission; she was making a statement, you know.

JG: As an accountant, somebody who cares about money being spent wisely, and you've been very involved with ELAPP from the start, you think it's run very efficiently—?

JS: I think the idea behind the set-up is really wonderful because people that are truly interested can come and be part of it. They have to attend three meetings within a certain time frame to be an eligible voter on the ELAPP general committee. We have a long page of people that come; mostly, the same people show up every time. Now, we have had a couple of problems. There was a site out west of here, and people in one of the neighborhoods got all upset because they didn't want all of the county's lake path—this Canterbury(??) out here—to go near their property. And the issue—that one—and then the issue of the Schultz property and the ferry got people all excited.

And so, I did begin to see a creep of the Sierra Club members coming and getting to be members of the general committee. They're all very much in favor of allowing the Schultz Preserve to become the site for the fair. A lot of us on ELAPP are not particularly in favor of doing that because we paid for the property, and over a million dollars was spent in the restoration of the property. The property that they would give in return, although it's on the shoreline, isn't quite the same. And I don't know. I don't know about that ferry. I sort of have a hard time seeing, gee, the county can commit 25 million dollars to that, but they won't let HART²⁴ have enough money to double the bus service.

So, you know, there's a—the other issue that was a hard one for some of us was down at West Shore, when they took down all those apartments down there. The city wanted that site to become a park, an ELAPP site. That site really didn't meet the ELAPP requirements. Most of it was dredge-and-fill, where it was waterfront. And they had all kinds of plans. I think because the city is more urban and they understand urban parks, maybe they don't get—or intentionally don't get—what a park site is that is just for quiet, reflective walking, hiking, you know, whatever, peaceful places. And so, Pam Iorio²⁵ instigated this huge crowd of people to come to an ELAPP meeting, a public hearing. We always have public hearings when we are selecting our sites, and we listen to the public and what they have to say.

And there's a line on the criteria in how we vote that gives public input. So if you get a lot of public input in favor of doing something like this, then they get a certain number of points in the ranking that we do. And it presented a problem because what they wanted us to pay for that property was, like, what they paid for the whole property. They wanted to recover almost all their

²⁴The Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority (HART) is the Hillsborough County's mass public transportation system.

²⁵Pam Iorio served as mayor of Tampa from 2003 to 2011.

money from ELAPP for that. And, as chair, I really felt that that was a really bad move because I do have a fiduciary responsibility to the general public to protect how the money is invested. And I didn't think that that was the best way to do it. We would've been paying them almost half of what they paid for the entire parcel, for this small section that would've been a park.

And, if you go down to that Cypress Point Park, they've done things in there that, generally speaking, on ELAPP, we don't see as being the right way to use the land. They've put in lovely restroom facilities, parking, paved sidewalks and all of this. And, generally, on our ELAPP sites, we like to keep them natural; that's kind of the point of the whole thing. In fact, Jan gives me a little grief, every now and then, about how we use ELAPP lands; that we have horseback riding and different things in there because she wanted them. I think her original goal was to just buy them, preserve them, protect them, and not have too many recreational uses in them. And so, on most of our ELAPP sites—that I'm sure you've been to—we have a parking area; it's not paved. And we don't usually have any facilities there or anything there for people. They're just natural.

JG: But, I mean, I think it is important to give people access to—

JS: Yes, I do too.

JG: —even if it's passive recreation, as you call it.

JS: Yeah. And, on most of our sites—we have a couple that we don't have people on, partly because of how they're situated, like on Blackwater Creek. But, like, that whole—what was it? Twelve thousand acres that we got out here on the Thomas property? You know, that's a wonderful place for people to go and ride horseback and walk around. Of course, some of them down in south county are so—and I have, you know, as close as I am to Violet Curry, I have never gone over there. Do you ever go in there?

JG: Every day I run. It's part of my running route. It's a nice—you know, it's not one of the most beautiful things, but there's a nice, little, beautiful lake in it and a lot of bird life.

JS: I like to go out to Brooker Creek. In fact, every time I go to Brooker Creek, you see deer or wild turkeys out there, and I've never seen a snake, which sort of surprises me. But, I think, the properties that we can allow public use on, we really should. One of the problems we did have on the general committee was we got some aeriels recently, and we have seen that people have cut fences and put their own little gates into the sites; one lady built a boardwalk, and they really can't do that. So that had to be stopped. Some of our bond covenants have required us to fence and lock the parcels. And so, that's an issue. I think Violet Curry might be one. Is that locked at night?

JG: Yes, it is. My claim to fame in Violet Curry is, you know, I run in there every day. Ed Radice, who was head of the parks back then—it would just drive me nuts because that gets a lot of use; I would pick up trash. And there was people who'd throw their trash, and there was no garbage can. And John Willy(??) used to work for the parks department; he was a buddy of mine. I told him, "John, put a couple of cans out there." So, sure enough, they put trash cans at the entrance. And Ed Radice used to say, "Well, we may not be able to do much, but we sure as hell can get some trash cans in there."

JS: I tell you, I used to think that there was no department in county government that could do more with less than the parks department.

JG: Yeah, Ed was a good man.

JS: He really was.

JG: Well, do you have a favorite spot, an ELAPP property?

JS: I like this new Lake Dan out here. I've been out to that a couple of times. What we want to do out there is we want to have, maybe, some Boy Scout fishing tournaments in the lake and canoeing. You know, it's a beautiful—it's a large, large piece of property. But it has some beautiful hammocks in it and the lakes. And to allow people access, that's going to be a great place for people to have passive rec in. And there—

JG: Can you get into it now?

JS: Yeah. And there are some buildings on the property that were there when we got it, so we have used those. There is a place where people can use restrooms and all, there.

JG: Well, is there anything I should've asked that I didn't ask? I know you're pressed for time. (JS laughs)

JS: I don't know. I think, probably, the most important thing for us, now, is to stick with our priority list, try to get those pieces that connect. And they're mostly the A and B sites. And, hopefully, I know we won't get all of them. It's about 27,000 acres, I think. I would like to get half of it. I think we're going to get to the point, now, where the most important thing for the

future is for us to find ways to help fund the maintenance of the sites. And one of the things that Pete and I have talked about is we could run money through Friends of the Parks. Like, I could make a donation to them, and I'd say, "I want this to go to the Lake Dan Preserve or the Brooker Creek Preserve," and they would use that money to do whatever they wanted, and the Friends [of the Parks] would pay for it.

The only thing they would have to do is request the money from us. And when we receive the request, then, the Friends of the Parks board votes on it, and if they approve it, then we give it. It works very well. We've done it for another organization, Paralympics²⁶, run by Andy Chasanoff, who just does a marvelous job. And it saves them a lot of money because, the donations that come in for that, they run through Friends of the Parks because we've always worked with children with disabilities. And that's one way, I think, of doing it. The other thing I would like to do, and I have talked to Mike about it a little; I haven't moved much on it. But to be able to do almost like Adopt-A-Highway.

Could we create the ability for, say, Verizon or GTE or whoever, if, you know, you make a donation to Friends of the Parks for money to be spent on an ELAPP site for maintenance. And we put a little sign out front that says, "This park maintained by Verizon." And they wouldn't get huge publicity, but the public would see that these people are really interested in helping us maintain these places. In one of the editorials that you wrote, you had a comment in it about Sherriff G(??) flying over and seeing all the development in south county, and he said how important it was that we buy some more of this land before there is nothing to get.

JG: Yeah, he was amazed to see how much was just, you know—

JS: Just bulldozed.

JG: Bulldozed. It's there one day, gone another.

JS: You know, they're putting in a Wawa down here, at the entrance to Northdale, and I was so distressed; they took down this gorgeous Grand Oak. And why couldn't they have found a way to build their building, and their pumps and all, around that and save that tree? I mean, it had to be 300 or 400 years old. It was just gorgeous. But I think funding our future is what it's going to take. I think, you know, when you talk to Mike and some of the county commissioners, they want to know how much land is enough land to preserve. And I don't know that there's a really good answer for that. Some people say it should be 30% of your property in your jurisdiction. I just think, if we do a really good job with the sites we have and get some new ones, that the issue

²⁶The Paralympic Games are Olympic-style games designed for athletes with disabilities. The games take place on the same years, and, since 1992, in the same venues as the Olympic Games.

for the ELAPP general committee will be working with the county to find ways to fund it. and I think that's—fund the maintenance and operation of these places.

JG: Very well. Thank you very much, Jan.

end of interview