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Joe Guidry (JG): Hi, this is Joe Guidry on January 26th, and I'm interviewing Joel Jackson. Can you tell me where you were born and raised?

Joel Jackson (JJ): I was born in Norfolk, Virginia, because my father was temporarily transferred there from Tampa to build minesweepers for the war.

JG: When did you come to Hillsborough County?

JJ: Well, my grandfather and grandmother came here in 1908, and I was born in 1942, but when I was a year old, in 1943, we moved back to Tampa.

JG: And where did you grow up?

JJ: Seminole Heights.

JG: Seminole Heights. So you've lived here all your life, then.

JJ: Right.

JG: What was Hillsborough County like when you were growing up?

JJ: Well, you know, it was interesting in that I felt like the city of Tampa and Hillsborough County was a little bit inferior in many ways because we were always hearing on the radio or watching television for someplace in California or New York or whatever, and it was just like we were a backwater. We didn't have air conditioning or anything, and I think most people didn't think a whole lot of Florida at the time.

JG: Can you describe the natural areas that you enjoyed?

JJ: Yeah, well, there were a lot of places. The Hillsborough State Park was a favorite place. We used to go there all the time. And I remember going to Lowry Park when part of Lowry Park was actually a landfill. A lot of the parks that we have now (doorbell rings) were actually landfills at one time.

JG: You were talking about the places.

JJ: You know, the Rowlett Park used to be a landfill, as well as Lowry Park. But my mother was the type that, you know, she made sure we went to a lot of places. You know, every year, the fairgrounds or downtown on Cass Street, and the Gasparilla Parade, and we were always going to the circus when it was in town and things of that sort. So my mother was pretty great about that sort of thing. And I learned a lot.

JG: We saw a lot of changes with growth and development and through the years.

JJ: Definitely.

JG: Did that have a big impact on you?

JJ: Yeah. You know, I had wanted to be an urban planner when I started back, and changed. When I came back to the United States in 1964, I went out to USEF, and I thought I'd cast around. I started taking different classes, and when I took Sociology, it really resonated with me because, up until then, I really wanted, very much, to understand how people thought, and how they reacted, and what motivated people, and all that. I became a more people-oriented person. And when I started taking those classes, I said, "Okay, this is something really special to me." But I only had a vague idea of what I would do after I graduated, but I was so, so terribly interested in it. And I thought, "Well, maybe I can become an urban planner." So after I graduated, I went into the City of Tampa, and they didn't have any planning department.

So I got a phone call—well, at the same time, Channel 13 had hired me as a part-time reporter while I was still in school, partly because they interviewed me for the Peace Corps. And in '64, when I came back, I became a little bit of a celebrity. I had 26 speaking engagements the very first year. Well, that kind of helped me become; it got me out of my shell a little bit. I became more oriented to how important it was to talk in front of groups and so forth. I felt a lot more comfortable with it. But I thought it was important to have a message. And so, I was actually still working at Channel 13 when we got married, and I quit that because it was hard at night and weekends; that's when I worked.

But I went into the city; they said they didn't have a planning department. I got a phone call from a guy that said, "I need a teacher. I lost my teacher. I need a teacher desperately. I'll do whatever it takes to hire you." So I went to work as a teacher, and I taught for a year and a half, sixth grade. And I thought it was very interesting; I enjoyed it immensely, but I wanted to move on with my life, so I quit that and went back into engineering a little bit. I had several companies that had offered me jobs, and then somebody came to me one day and said, "We want you to come to work for the Model Cities Program¹." And I said, "Well, okay," [and that] I would come down for an interview. And I wasn't that keen on it, to be honest with you.

But they hired me, and then the Model Cities Program morphed into the Metropolitan Development Agency within a year or so, and then that morphed into the first planning department for the city of Tampa. And then I became the manager of a group. There were like six of us, and it was all the city services. Each planner had a cluster of the city services. It was very interesting. But then I decided to specialize in parks because I had a park—it was actually the Al Lopez Park, and I was trying to do an upgrade of the master plan, and one thing led to the other, and I really realized that I didn't know a lot about designing parks. So I went over to Pinellas County, and I started talking to them over there because they build good parks.

And the guy named Jim Work(??) was there as the director, and he was just really helpful. And I told myself, "This is what I want to do with my life. This is really exciting. This is what I want with my life." So that orientation led me, again, to go back to school and get a master's degree in management. And then when the county had a 10,000,000-dollar bond issued to build these natural parks—like Lettuce Lake, Alderman's Ford, Upper Tampa Bay, the Edward Medard Park and so forth—I was really well positioned for that, and they hired me. And then, I just threw myself at it and just loved every minute of it. It became a passion. It was my mission in life.

¹The Model Cities Program, which operated under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development between 1966 and 1974, was a federal urban aid program that worked to reform city planning programs in order to combat issues specific to impoverished urban communities.

And I would go back over to Pinellas County, and they would help me out, give me specifications and drawings and so forth. And I would learn from that, and I would come back, and I would apply it because I knew that when people went to these Hillsborough County parks, they would compare them with the Pinellas County parks. And I didn't want us to come out on the lesser of the deal. So it was a passion. And the interesting thing was, right after my wife and I got married, I got involved with the Save Our Bay organization, and that really kind of set my head in that direction because I realized how important it was to educate the general public on things that were important environmentally because Hillsborough County was growing so rapidly.

There were very few places left of Hillsborough, Tampa Bay, that were not already dredged and filled. And I worked for several years for a dredging company in working design work for them. And so, we had a meeting. I went to the very first meeting of the Save Our Bay. It was 17 people; we signed up and joined the organization. It was at Betty Castor and Don Castor's house in Carrollwood. Rodger Stood was there, and a number of other people were there.

JG: Was John Betts there?

JJ: John Betts was there. And I was so inspired by that. And there was a professor from the University of South Florida that had been—well, when I was in sociology, we studied a lot about urban movements and about how change comes about. And he was really good at organizing, so we really organized, and we had several meetings with the port authority, and then we had a big public meeting at the courthouse on the third floor of the old courthouse building.

And we had—there was no place to sit. I mean, it was standing room only, and it's a big auditorium. It was incredible. And that meeting went on. I left about 2:00 o'clock in the morning. I had to get back to work the next morning. But the meeting went on, like, until 3:00. The next day, the attorney for the port authority drafted a letter, and I've got a copy of it; I can't find it anywhere. But the copy was very, very simple and straightforward, and it said that, "You have been granted the rights to the bottomland, but that does not guarantee you a dredge and fill permit," and that was a change in policy that had stood for years, "and therefore we are denying your dredge and fill permit." Well, Apollo Beach was that; Apollo Beach's developer was granted the bottom rights, and he filled it. That's how Apollo Beach came about. But this change in policy was so significant and basically had dealt with the Bower Tract, which was—

JG: Is that what precipitated the Save Our Bay?

JJ: Yes. It was the dredge and fill of the Bower Tract. Well, the funny thing was that, when I was hired by Hillsborough County in 1977, one of the first things they did was they took me to this area in Upper Tampa Bay [Park] near Double Branch Creek, and they said, “Here we have almost 600 acres,” and I looked out over there, and I said, “Wait a minute. That’s the Bower Tract over there. Right across the creek. The Bower Tract, the one I’d worked so hard to save, and here I am building a park right next to it! How exciting is that?”

So, within a few months, a fella came to my office, and he had been a county engineer, and he said that he was representing the owners of that land, and they wanted to know if we wanted to buy it. Well, when he told me the price, I said, “You know, I have money in the bond program to buy land. In fact, I had purchased like 17 or 18 acres of the land that is now Upper Tampa Bay Park, and I doubled the size of Lettuce Lake Park by acquiring land there. And I added a lot of land down at Alderman’s Ford [Park], but I didn’t have—I mean, he’s talking about four or five million dollars here for this parcel over here. Well, I didn’t have anywhere near that. So I said, “Well, you know, thank you very much. I will take this under consideration.” Dane Piercefield was his name by the way.

So about 1980, I was handed an envelope, and it was from the state of Florida, and they said there was a program for land acquisition because I had talked to all kinds of [places]: the conservancy, the nature conservancy, and all kinds of places trying to find money to buy this land. Well, they said, “We would like Hillsborough County,” in fact, it was addressed to all counties, “to submit three projects for consideration under the CRL Program,” which was the Conservation of Recreational Lands Program. So I said, “Wow, this is really important.” So I went over; the planning commission, at that time, was right next door to my office. I went over there. It was in the courthouse, second floor.

And he said, “Oh, no, we don’t want anything to do with that. We’ve got our own thing to do,” and so forth. So I said, “This is too important,” and I was so busy trying to get this other stuff done with all these parks, trying to get them built, and I only had myself, and we were down one employee. I mean, I was just driving myself crazy. But I said, “This is too important.” So I said, “Okay, I’ve just got to get this done.” So I got some advice from some of the people in the planning commission. I talked to a number of other people, environmentalists. And one of the things about me is that I rely heavily on advice from others that I think are knowledgeable people. So I went to these people—Robin Lewis was one, and Hans Zarbock was another, with the planning commission and several others.

And so, I got some advice, and we nominated three parcels. One was the Bower Tract, one was Fish Creek, which is over and actually belonged to the *Tampa Tribune* company.

That's where their WEDU tower—or the WFLA tower was. Another was the Cockroach Islands, which belonged to an ex-state legislator named Whitaker, Tom Whitaker. And they were interested in selling. I mean, Tom took me up in a helicopter, showed me the islands, how important it was and all that. So I put these three nominations in, and I had, then, an invitation to go to Gainesville to testify before a public hearing there. And I took with me Fred Webb from HCC, who was a big help, really great advice from Fred. And the other was, with the Audubon Society², and he was the administrator or the overseer for the Tampa Bay Estuary, and that was Rich Paul.

So we went there, and we testified and so forth and gave it our best shot. But things got political and very complicated. And then, as '83 and '81 went by and so forth, there was a big battle going back and forth and all this kind of thing. They decided, in Tallahassee, they wanted to come down and take a look at the Upper Tampa Bay Park—I'm sorry, the Bower Tract. So I actually got a boat from, the EPC³ gave me a boat and a truck to pull it. And I, on two different occasions, met this whole group of people, must have been 12 or 13, took them out there, showed them all the aerials; we went around on all the islands out there, showed them everything.

And I had to do a lot of things to get that going. I mean, I had to get archaeological studies and letters from different people from USF. Professors, I would ask them to come with me, and I would go out there, and we'd go around checking these various sites. We found a lot of archaeological sites in that area. I had to get letters from different organizations like Audubon and Sierra Club⁴. Actually, Sierra Club was starting just about then. They asked me to be the first speaker at the Sierra Club back when they were starting. And then, [Florida] Native Plant Society⁵ and all these different groups of people, had all these letters and so forth, and I shipped them all up there to them.

And then, something happened. And that was, right in the middle of all this, I had bought a lot of land for Upper Tampa Bay and Lettuce Lake and so forth mostly through the Land and Water Conservation Fund⁶, which is a federal fund. I really went into that. I had

²The National Audubon Society is an organization devoted to conserving and protecting birds and other wildlife, as well as restoring and safeguarding animal habitats and natural resources across the United States.

³EPC stands for Environmental Protection Commission of Hillsborough County.

⁴Sierra Club is a national environmental organization that practices political activism and coordinates outdoor programs in state and national parks across the United States. Their motto, "Explore, enjoy and protect the planet," speaks to their goals of promoting responsible engagement with natural resources, protecting the ecosystems of the Americas, and advocating for environmental rights.

⁵The Florida Native Plant Society is an organization dedicated to the preservation, conservation, and restoration of the native plants of Florida through research, support for conservation land acquisition, education, and influencing public policy.

⁶The Land and Water Conservation Fund was founded in 1964 with the purpose of conserving America's natural and cultural heritage; the fund still operates today. It is dedicated to the conservation of national parks, wilderness, and historical sites, as well as developing state and local parks, connecting urban youth to nature, and helping protect endangered species, among other environmental protection activities.

raised over 2.4 million dollars in extra money, of grant money, which added to my 10 million dollars. So I made a deal with the budgeting department, and they were the ones that actually told me I could do this, that I put that money, that 2.4 million, into a special account. And when I drew down all the bond money, then I would start using that. And I had saved that money for land acquisition.

Well, the budget director changed in a year or so. Bill Tatum was accounting administrator. I called up the budget office and said, "Look, I'm ready to start drawing down this 2.4 [million dollars]," and he said, "You need to come over and have a talk." I went over to his office, and he said, "Bill Tatum directed us to move that money into the general fund, and it's not yours anymore." And it was devastating to me. Well, I knew that the time was coming near. And then we had three county commissioners indicted, just months before my job was going to end with Hillsborough County. So Ed Radus, the director, said, "I'm going to try to get you another job," but then they put a hiring freeze. So I was in a very awkward position.

I mean, I was really looking at a serious thing here, where by tenure, my six-year tenure under the bond program because the bond program was six years; at the end of six years, the bond program is over; I won't have a job. Well, and no job prospects in Hillsborough County, three county commissioners indicted, so I was desperate. And I remember when I had brought up the topic of trying to buy the Bower Tract, one of the county commissioners actually got upset with me and told me that this was out of my purview. But what happened was, I went to Betty Castor. I knew Betty Castor. I remember when we had fought the battle at Save Our Bay on the Bower Tract, and how we were able to be successful, she came to me and she says, "Joel, if you ever need a favor, let me know." So I went to her. She was at USF. She was in charge, at that time, of intergovernmental, uh—

JG: Relations?

JJ: Relations. And I said, "Look, you know, I need a favor. I'm leaving, my job is ending, and I can't fight this battle." And she said, "Let me see what I can do." Well, it was then, when she turned to one of the county administrators that she had lunch with—or the county commissioner got upset with me, Fran Davin. I mean, she really got upset with me.

JG: Because you were trying to save the land?

JJ: Well, partly because I had gone outside the county to Betty. The other thing was that she, Fran Davin, had had a bad taste in her mouth for the owners of the Bower Tract on

another deal. And I told her, I said, “Look, it’s not a matter of who they are; it’s a matter that this land ought to be purchased. That’s what I’m going for. I’m not rewarding them to buy it. I’m concentrating on the fact that this ought to be public land.” And she didn’t want to hear that. But anyway, I was beaten. So I left Hillsborough County, and then, after I was gone, Betty came and appeared before the county commission a couple of times and really encouraged them to go forward and find the money, even though the program had already—there was no other money; the county had already spent some funds and so forth. I’ve got clippings here of that.

And then, Ed Radus called me up. This is after I had already been gone. The City of Tampa called me up and offered me to come back, which was nice. So I went back, but this time, instead of going to the planning department, I went to the parks department, which they thought was going to be a better fit for me. And it was, in many ways. So Ed Radus called me up after a couple of years, this is probably ’84 or ’85, somewhere in there, ’85, and he said that he had been talking to Jan Platt and that she wanted to go with a bond program.

Well, my first thought was, and being very honest with you, that Jan Platt’s motivation was, going back to where I had been stranded trying to raise money for the Cockroach Islands and the Bower Tract, but she was really thinking more about other things. I mean, she had heard other counties were doing and so forth. So it was, really, kind of a coincidence that this happened to come along. And so, my motivation was, right away, I went back, I called up. When I was doing the bond program, the 10 million dollar bond issue for natural parks, I had an advisory committee, and it was made up of a really good group of people.

So I call them up, and I said, “Look, I’m going to start drafting a plan to go on the ballot for a land-buying program, and I’d like to invite you to come and join me. It’s going to be after work. It’s going to be something we’ll do in the evenings.” And I met them once a week for probably eight weeks, and some of them came; most of them came. And I’ve made a list of some of them over there. And so, we sat down, and I, working on my AtariWriter, which was the only computer that I had at the time—it was really primitive. And I eventually drafted up the guidelines.

Now, I had a lot of experience with the Land and Water Conservation [Fund]. I knew the guidelines really well, and I understood a lot of really basic things that a land-buying program ought to have in the guidelines. So I applied that; I heard a lot of people and their comments. We would discuss it and argue back and forth and, finally, we’d say, “Okay, this is what we’re going to do.” So after about eight weeks or so, I typed up everything, and I took it, and I gave it to Hillsborough County.

JG: So you essentially did all of this as a volunteer, then?

JJ: Absolutely.

JG: You were no longer with the county.

JJ: No longer with the county.

JG: You did all that work, and you developed those guidelines. And after you gave it to Ed, he took—

JJ: (papers shuffling) Yeah, I wanted to show you something here, if I can find it. Uh, this is, these are my handwritten, there are the fourteen-points. These became classic, okay? This was an evaluation form that I made up, and it has all the different criteria and how we would rate it and so forth. This was the very first rating sheet that we had for the ELAPP sites. (papers shuffling)

JG: Could you quickly read those off please?

JJ: Well, okay. The first one was, [reading from list of ELAPP guidelines] “Contain relatively unaltered flora and fauna. Habitat for endangered or threatened species,” in other words, it would have that. “Significant geological features. Water, fish, wildlife protected only by acquisition,” in other words, if we didn’t acquire it, they were not protected. “Site-access links and buffers warrant addition,” in other words, if this site was critical to other sites and provided access to other sites or links to other sites or buffers warrant addition to other sites. That was a significant thing. “Had archaeological sites of some significance. The degree of endangerment,” in other words, how close was it to being developed? “The degree of degradation to the site itself,” in other words, is that site pretty pristine, or has it already been degraded [sic] to where it’s no longer valuable? Um, number nine, “The site’s loss would degrade adjacent areas,” in other words, if we lost this area, would it then have an impact on other areas that would be natural areas, which suffer? “The long-term protection and management of the resource,” in other words, was it important to that? “Its value for educational or scientific uses. The value for resource-based recreation,” in other words, that was one of the ones towards the end there. And then we had the total score for each of these.

That was actually 12, and we added a couple more to it a little later on. And one was that we realized, after we started into the program, that there were some sites that were

degraded but that could be rehabbed or restored back to a very pristine state, so we added some extra things here to allow for that. And I think that was important that we did that. But we said that it had to be, at the time of acquisition, the money had to already be in place for that restoration, which was an absolute thing. And there was one other thing here too.

But there were some conditions that we put into it. The ease of acquisition is another criteria. Some of the sites may contain many, many different parcels that would be very difficult, and we wanted to make sure that that was—and then if there was any assistance from the state, for example, the CRL Program or whatever to help on the acquisition of that. So these are all things that we looked at. And then, these became kind of adopted into the major plan.

JG: So all that, that you originally proposed ended up being in the final plan?

JJ: Yeah. And the interesting thing is that I was invited back to help draft the long-term objectives and the strategic plan for the ELAP Program, and it was very, very satisfying and rewarding to see that this is still what it is. In other words, it didn't wander off. It wasn't aborted. It wasn't changed. And one of the things that happened in the early '90s was that the City of Tampa decided there was a lot downtown, and they wanted to buy that property under the ELAP Program. And I was working for the city at the time, so that put me in a very awkward situation.

And there was an article in the paper, and, you know, the thing is, too, when you're working for a county, like I was, or any of us staff people, no one knows who you are. You fly below the radar. You're behind the scenes. And it's interesting because it was said in the article, the city—or actually, somebody was quoted as saying, "Well, the guy that drafted these guidelines was actually a city employee at the time," and I thought that was rather interesting because they never mentioned my name. I don't know where it is at the moment, but anyway.

JG: But it was not an environmentally threatened piece of property? It was just—?

JJ: No, it wasn't. It was a lot down—it was an urban lot. It was in a parking lot or something. And they wanted to make that a park. As much as I thought it was a good idea to build a park, it really wasn't an environmental piece of property. And one of the things that I felt very strongly about, and we put it into the guidelines too, is that, once a parcel is acquired through ELAPP, it becomes dedicated for future generations. I mean, it's dedicated. And this is part of the guidelines from the land and water conservation fund that I picked out, and that is that it can't be diverted to any other use.

I had the experience, when I was with the City of Tampa where we had a park, Gary Park, and someone in the department decided they needed it for a reservoir. Next thing you know, they called me up one day and said, "You can say goodbye to your park. It's going to be a reservoir." So we put conditions in there that said that it can't be done; you can't divert it to another use, which, I think, a lot of people just didn't understand. They thought that, because it was city or county property, that it was free for them to do whatever they wanted to do with it. You know, if they were in the engineering department or something of that sort, so.

JG: So you've remained involved with ELAPP throughout its history.

JJ: Yeah, well, there was a period of time in the—when I came back to work for Hillsborough County in 1993 because I stayed with the city ten years, and they had another bond issue. And Ed Radus came over and said, "Joel, we want you back." And I said, "Well, look, I've got like two months to go before I get my ten years vested." And I lost seven years before going to the county in my city retirement. And he said, "I'll wait on you." So he waited on me.

And so, then, when I got back to the county, I had been on the committee while it was with the city because I was representing the city. But when I got back to the county, I was accounting staffer, and I felt awkward about that, being on the ELAPP committee. And I knew there were other people that wanted to be on the committee, so I vacated my position and got off. And then after I retired, I decided, "Well, now's the time to get back, now that I'm retired." So I did. And that's why I'm back again and helping any way I can. And it's a great bunch of people now, working with that. What happened was, when I was building Lettuce Lake Park, I was desperate for environmentalists, and I didn't have anybody.

And I gave a lot of talks, and I went to an Audubon [Society] meeting, and I gave a talk on the bond program. They were building these parks, and I showed them a lot of pictures and so forth. And there was a fellow there, that he also gave a presentation. And I thought, "Well, that guy is pretty sharp." So I went to him, and I talked with him, and the more I talked with him, the more convinced I became that this was what I was looking for. And he told me he worked for the State Parks Department [Florida Department of Environmental Protections' Division of Recreation and Parks].

So the next day, I went to find him at the state park, and he was in Ybor City in the Ferlita Bakery site⁷; it was this preservation thing. And I found him, and I talked with him, and I told him how important it was that he'd come to work for me. And the next day he called me up and said he would. And we hired him. And that was a major acquisition worth hiring. He not only helped me at Lettuce Lake Park; he helped me with the boardwalk there, but he then took over the ELAP Program after we got it going. And he was one of the main advisors to me and my committee when we put the guidelines together. So I was just thrilled that we had that continuity there. He's a very capable fella, and he managed that program until he retired.

JG: Who was that?

JJ: It was Rob Heath⁸.

JG: Oh!

JJ: You know Rob.

JG: Oh, yeah. He was—

JJ: Great guy. I think the world of him. And I was just thrilled that he—and I think the fact that he worked with me on crafting the guidelines together; he had such good input and such good ideas and so forth about it. We worked really good together. And then, when he was able to take that program that he helped birth and take it and run with it, it made all the difference in the world. And I was really pleased with that. And they've done well. They did well.

JG: One of the things about ELAPP, too, is it works with and collaborates with other state agencies in acquiring land.

JJ: Right. That was one of our points, that acquisition with other agencies. And the ability to work deals with other groups of people to administer and maintain because one of the key things, too, was that we had the acquisition criteria, but then we had a set of

⁷The Ferlita Bakery was established in Ybor City in 1896 by Cuban-Spanish-Italian immigrant Francisco Ferlita. For decades, it was an incredibly popular spot among Cuban expatriates looking to buy fresh Cuban bread. The building once occupied by the bakery, which was destroyed by a fire in 1922, has since been restored and repurposed into the Ybor City State Museum.

⁸An interview of Robert Heath is available as part of the ELAPP Oral History Project collection.

guidelines for how, then, things would transition. And one of them was that each site would then have a management plan. And this was critical because a management plan laid out how that site is going to be maintained, and how it's going to be restored or kept forever. That was the idea. And that management plan had to be in writing. It had to be updated every so many years. And that was the key part of it: to make sure that we don't go buy a piece of land that'll later run down. We get rid of the non-native vegetation, for example, we burn it on a regular basis and so forth, to keep it pristine.

And these are heritage kinds of things. In 50 years and 100 years, people should be able to go to one of these parks or one of these sites and know what Hillsborough County was like. It's not a matter of just making it something pretty. I was very upset when I left the county, and they started planting all kinds of ornamentals there at Lettuce Lake Park and so forth. And I got back with them, and I tried to say, "Look, this is a preserve for future generations. You can't start doing this kind of thing."

But the thing was that I really wasn't in charge anymore. And it bothered me. And that's one reason it took me years to go back. I mean, I just didn't feel comfortable going back. But now, I can tell you, the new group of people they have—and you know the department's split now, so they're into conservation much more than they were before—are very much of the same mind. And I'm thrilled.

JG: Are there any misunderstandings about ELAPP, do you think, by the public or public officials?

JJ: Well, I think there may be, perhaps, a lot of simply not being fully aware of it. One of the problems that there is, and I have had, is that adjacent property owners are sometimes careless in letting their pets and so forth wander over and into the site, or sites, or let nonnative vegetation in the yard that escapes, and it's invasive and getting into the site. And in some cases, there have been, actually, people cutting roads, shortcuts, and so forth, into the sites. Rob was having a terrible time over at one of the Sinclair Hills [sites], where he planted a buffer along the boundary of the park, and suddenly all the trees were cut down, and he planted them again, and all the trees were cut down a second time because people wanted to be able to have an eyesight into the park, into the preserve, but then people in the preserve see their houses, which was what Rob was trying to save.

You know, it's that kind of thing. But, in general, there have been so many great things. I was surprised by the excitement of the real estate industry because they love ELAPP sites. It raises the value of their residential properties adjacent, to a great degree, when they can advertise, "This is next to a conservation site." I was surprised. I didn't expect that. In fact, the representative of a real estate group came to me and told me that this was

something that, if we ever decide to do any more of, you know, any additions or whatever, that they wanted very much to be there beating the drums for us, and I thought that was great.

JG: Oh, that is. Any challenges that you see for ELAPP now and in the future?

JJ: Well, there is something, and that is that there are people that feel as though maybe we've acquired everything that we need to acquire. And the second thing is that there are some people that are very concerned about taking things off the tax rolls. But what the staff has been doing in the last year or so has been to look at the economics of these sites and actually document how valuable the sites are in the way they contribute to things like—and some of these are intangibles, but—water conservation, clean air, noise, reduction in traffic on the roads adjacent to them.

There is just a whole, long list of things that are serious benefits that go beyond just the conservation, and I think that's very important because, once people realize how really, truly valuable these sites are and how they contribute to our lifestyle, that's got to be important. Where I had listed, this is—I wanted to give you this. These are talking points, but I had gathered together some of the names. These are the original committee members. And then here I go into some of the things that the sites actually do for us that are things that are beyond—

JG: Could you read some of what you consider the most important of those achievements?

JJ: Well, originally, we were preoccupied with this one, and that was that we wanted to buy land because it was irreplaceable, and these sites might be lost forever. So that was our initial thrust. That was where our priority was at the very beginning. And then, we started thinking about, well, you know, this also has a lot of other things.

For example, [reading from list of talking points] “Environmental education, increased outdoor resources and recreation, valuable wildlife quarters, enhancing the wildlife population of the county,” which is in serious—wildlife has declined, in the last probably 15 or 20 years, so much, in some cases [by] 90%. “The quality of life and health associated with public access to unspoiled natural areas,” a lot of people go to these sites and find it very healthy for their psychological wellbeing. This fella here that went to Lettuce Lake Park and took these beautiful pictures, he was actually a cancer patient, and he was really down in the dumps, and it really made him feel so good, and his mental state just turned around, that he took a series of those pictures that are now in a lot of places.

But the, uh, “Ensuring that our descendants have examples of natural, unspoiled Florida to enjoy and treasure; protecting valuable water resources; reducing storm-water runoff; aquifer recharge; improving the quality of rivers and streams, lakes, and even Tampa Bay.” I work with the CRL Program under a lot of projects. “Positive impact by promoting eco-tourism,” which is becoming a really big deal, now. I’m really surprised, to be honest with you, how much that’s taken off.

“Providing an alternative to sprawling development,” and it means that there is a reduction in the amount of infrastructure that has to be extended out into outlying areas with water and sewer and so forth. And traffic congestion and public utilities and so forth, and then, of course, the increase in real-estate values. These are things that we really weren’t thinking that much about, except maybe the first couple, but that have actually become a very important part of the ELAPP story.

JG: Well, that’s great. Joel, I think we’ve gone over pretty much all the questions you’ve addressed in our discussion, but is there anything that you would like to add that we didn’t ask you, or that didn’t come up, that you would think is important to address?

JJ: There are a couple of things that I thought about when we were talking, and there are a lot of times when my mind is going five different ways and only two or three can manage it. One of the things I found very exciting was, I was invited to come to the evaluation of the Bower Tract because they have to do that, and that’s actually state property, by the way, because it was bought mostly through state money and prior to ELAPP. And they had just the whole packet of information there, and as I went through it, to see these letters that I had drafted back then, or letters to me in response; like, I had asked people to help with the archaeological surveys and so forth. I had all these letters from them.

And it was so great to see so many people working together to helping to do this. It’s not just me. What I’m saying, it’s not about me. It’s that I was able to actually be a part of this, to be a partner in this, to work with people, and that’s the excitement that I have. And once I adopted that attitude—in other words, it’s not, I’m not trying to do this, but I can help and get people to work together to do this. And to me, it was just terribly exciting. And the other thing that’s interesting, I think, is that, when I was in high school, I sat next to a student who I admired immensely, all through high school, and it was partly because the alphabetical order that we sat. And her name was, actually, it was Jan Platt’s sister, Bobby Lou Kaminis.

And I can’t say I didn’t have a crush on her, but I admired her immensely. She was, I told myself that if I ever have a daughter, this is what I’d like to have. She was smart and

talented, and when she was 24 years old, she died of cancer. And Jan Platt was actually teaching at Hillsborough when I was there. And when I took the test to go in the Peace Corps, Jan Platt was there. She was also offered an opportunity to go in the Peace Corps, and she decided to stay because she wanted to get married. And she married a pilot from MacDill Air Force Base. Well, she told me—the first time I met Jan Platt, again, was when she was working with the girl scouts, and she was deciding to run for city council I think it was. And I was in a group called PLAY; it was Professionals Associated for Youth or something of that sort.

And so, I actually talked to her a lot about that time. And then she became city council person, and then I was working with the city and so forth in the planning department. So I really got to know her fairly well. And then, one thing led to the other, but when I met her at the library at USF here, probably about a year ago now, she told me that she doesn't remember a lot anymore because of her operations and her medications and so forth. She says, "I just don't remember a lot." And she really struggled, and she had trouble even remembering me. And I felt bad about that because, one day, when she saw me, she said, "You know, I know you from someplace, but I can't remember where—wait, are you a consultant? Or are you a—?" I said, "No, it's me, Joel Jackson. We worked so many times together."

But anyway, I was thrilled to be, and I've told her every time I see her that she's one of my heroes, and I have several heroes. And John Betts was one, you're one, and she's one. But life is very fleeting, and we're only here a short time. And I really feel as though that, it's not about how I live my life now, but what I leave that's important to me. I see my life as very—you know, I'm 74 years old, you know?

JG: It's hard to believe, Joel.

JJ: So I, you know, I've never—when I do this work, I'm not thinking about, "Oh, this is fun. I like to do it because I'm enjoying it." I do it because I want to make this place a better world, and that's what drives me, honestly.

JG: Well, it's, I mean, what you've helped achieved here is really remarkable. It is considered probably one of the most successful and efficient county programs we've done. God knows what would've happened to all that land if you hadn't gotten involved. I really appreciate you taking all this time to talk to me.

JJ: Well, it's a passion. And, you know, I looked back at Save Our Bay and said, "Why didn't I take better notes back then? Why didn't I take some pictures back then?" But, you know, I was never thinking about 20 or 30 years down the road. I was thinking about,

just so absorbed in what we were doing at the time, not really thinking of—I remember one time, Bill Tatum, when I got the three nominations; I put in three nominations and got two, the Cockroach Islands and the Bower Tract. And he said, “Oh, you’ve got a couple of feathers in your hat.” And I thought to myself, I didn’t think of it that way. You know, I’m just glad I was able to pull it off and get it going, you know?

End of Interview