

Oral Memoirs
of
Bernie Blackwood

An Interview Conducted by

Alexandra Dobson

March 19, 2015

Oviedo History Harvest

Dr. Connie L. Lester's Introduction to Public History Graduate Course

Spring 2015

Regional Initiative for Collecting the History, Experiences, and Stories (RICHERS) of Central Florida

Oviedo Historical Society

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Interview Histories

Interviewer: Alexandra Dobson

Transcriber: Alexandra Dobson

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the RICHES of Central Florida Department, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida.

Project Detail

RICHES of Central Florida is an umbrella program housing interdisciplinary public history projects that bring together different departments at UCF with profit and non-profit sectors of the community.

Central Florida has often been associated with large-scale, commercial tourism and housing development. While those aspects of Central Florida are important to the economic growth of the region, much of its history has remained unnoticed and under researched. The Public History program at UCF links many projects under one initiative to promote the collection and preservation of Central Florida history. By facilitating research that records and presents the stories of communities, businesses, and institutions in Central Florida, RICHES seeks to provide the region with a deeper sense of its heritage. At the same time, the initiative connects the UCF students and faculty with the community and creates a foundation on which Central Floridians can build a better sense of their history.

The Oviedo Historical Society was organized in November 1973 by a group of citizens. The society is a 501(3) non-profit organization. Its purpose is to help preserve the community identity of Oviedo by collecting and disseminating knowledge about local history, serve as a repository for documents and artifacts relating to Oviedo history, promote the preservation and marking of historic sites and buildings in the Oviedo area and foster interest in local, state, national, and world history.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Bernie Blackwood is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on March 19, 2015.

Abstract

An oral history interview of Bernard O. Blackwood, conducted by Alexandra Dobson on March 19, 2015. Blackwood was born on April 9, 1933, and attended the University of Florida (UF) in Gainesville, Florida. After graduating from college, Blackwood migrated to St. Petersburg with

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his wife, Suzanne A. Blackwood, to work as a city planner. In the 1970s, the couple moved to Oviedo with their children. There, Blackwood helped plan several residential subdivisions alongside Ben Ward, Jr. Interview topics include land development, the effects of Florida Technological University (present-day University of Central Florida), Blackwood's wife and children, Ben Ward's contributions to the community, desegregation and the Civil Rights Movement in St. Petersburg, and his career as a city planner.

Bernard O. Blackwood

Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Alexandra Dobson
March 19, 2015
Oviedo, Florida

0:00:00

Introduction

Dobson This is an oral history interview of Bernie¹ [O.] Blackwood. Interview is conducted by Alexandra Dobson at the Blackwood home in Oviedo, Florida, on the 19th of March, 2015. Inter – interview topics include Oviedo, Mead Manor, and that’s it.

Blackwood Well, my name’s Bernie Blackwood, and my association with Oviedo began in the early [19]50s. I was a student at Gainesville,² and I had a roommate named Bob Ward, who was a native of Oviedo, and I came to Oviedo on occasions on weekend with Bob, and got to know a little bit about the area. It was so different from my, uh, little home town in North Florida. I saw orange groves and celery fields and stuff, to – tobacco fields, uh – shade[?] tobacco fields it was up there, but, um, when I finished at Gainesville, I went right to work. I had a job waiting in Saint Petersburg[, Florida], and, uh, Bob and I kept in contact over the years, and through Bob I had met his brother, Ben Ward – Ben Ward, Jr., and, uh, we’d been in St. Pete four or five years. I – I guess it was around 1963 when Ben called me – Ben Ward, Bob’s brother – and said he was developing a subdivision. He and a group of, uh, investors and businesspeople here in O – Oviedo were developing a subdivision, and they had started, but they’d ran into a few troubles, and he knew I – through Bob – knew had a little – had – I had a little experience in land planning.

0:01:48

Land development

Blackwood So he asked me if I’d come up, take a look at what he had, and I was glad to do it, because it gave me a chance to visit Bob, and Ben brought me out. it’s a 40-acre site in – northeast, uh, Oviedo – beautiful piece of land – and made it clear to me to – to begin with they wanted large lots, nice home sites, and the group of, uh, investors and businesspeople, who, uh, put their money up for this project, wanted the same thing. They wanted to grow Oviedo and they knew there was nothing in Oviedo, at that time. No lots available, really. I don’t think there’d been any residential lots added in Oviedo since probably the early 1900s, and –

¹ Bernard.

² University of Florida.

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so I went to work on the plan, and, uh, came up with something that they agreed with.

Oh, I'm getting a little ahead of myself maybe, because they had actually started – they had, uh, put the group together, and they had paved a little section of Mead Drive, which is the entrance off of Division Street into Mead Manor, at that time, Three or four hundred – two or three hundred feet, I'd say, and then it made a right turn into a little cul-de-sac, and they had, uh – [laughs] they didn't know quite where to go from there, because they had three – three swampy areas – little ponds in the 40 acres. So we developed a plan, uh, around those ponds, uh, with nice size lots and streets running around, and, uh, they approved the plan and, [clears throat] I came up one weekend – one Saturday with an engineer friend of my from St. Pete, and, uh, the streets had been, uh, cleared, and we shot grades, went back to St. Pete, and did a cut-and-fill plan, and presented that to the group, and they went from there and started developing the subdivision.

0:04:07

Florida Technological University³ and the Oviedo Land Group

Blackwood And the – they paved the streets, they put in paved streets with gutters, and they had a water system in Oviedo at that time, so it was on a water system, and the, uh, next, uh – next thing we knew, uh – I should say that before they started this project, there was no know – knowledge of FTU⁴ locating five miles south of Oviedo. It, eh – I asked Ben later, and he said “No,” uh, “We didn't know it,” and I thought they were crazy, at the time, for – for footing this kind of subdivision and – and – [laughs] out in Oviedo with just a little crossroads farm community, and I didn't know where the people were going to come from, and Ben said, “Oh, they'll come.” He was an eternal optimist, and the next thing I knew, I read – read in *The St. Pete[rsburg] Times* where FTU was locating five miles south of Oviedo. So I began to be a little more interested in what was going on, and they began selling the lots. First lot they sold in here – or maybe the second one – uh, I know it was the first person from the university – was a man named Phil Gorey[sp] and he was a, um – one of the administrative people under Millican – Dr. [Charles Norman] Millican, and the, uh – the subdivision took off rather slowly, but they were selling lots. A lot across the street there was, uh – was, uh, [Joe] Gomez, uh...

Suzanne He was a professor out there.

Blackwood Yeah, What's the first, uh...

Suzanne Joe.

³ Present-day University of Central Florida.

⁴ Florida Technological University.

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Blackwood Uh...

Suzanne Joe.

Blackwood Joe. Yeah, Joe Gomez. He was a comptroller out at the university, and, uh, there were three or four, five, six – I mean, there half a dozen, at least, uh, different professors that started buying lots out, and some of them still here, like me [*laughs*]. I'm not a professor [*laughs*], um, and as the lots started selling, the land group – Oviedo Land Group was the name of the, uh – of the, corpora – or the company that Ben Ward put together, and the investors in it – I could – I can recall most of 'em, I think. There was, uh, Frank Wheeler, John Evans, uh, I think Mr. Roy Clonts, probably, um...

Suzanne Beleren[sp]?

Blackwood Who?

Suzanne Bob[?] Beleren? Was he one of 'em?

Blackwood No, no, not, uh, not, uh...

Suzanne Okay.

Blackwood Uh, uh...

Suzanne Martin?

Blackwood Yeah.

Suzanne Bill...

Blackwood Bill...

Suzanne Martin?

Blackwood Yeah, Bill Martin and John Evans. I might have...

Suzanne Yeah.

Blackwood Said him before, but anyway, it was a group of local businessmen and there were five or six of 'em. I met with them a couple times, and, uh, didn't really know them at – at all. I have since gotten to know them all, one time or another, and, uh – so they decided to buy another 40 acres just, uh, to the north of the first unit, and, uh I – again, I did a layout for them, and Ben developed it, and so it made a total of 80 acres here in Oviedo, and I – I'd be glad to drive you around and show you if you'd like to see it. Some of the developers've[sic] been dead, but during this time, Ben was still planning ahead and the next thing – he had a project.

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Another, uh—I think it was another 40 acres, and—and they—we worked up a subdivision for him on that—a layout, and it’s called [inaudible] Garden Grove. It’s right near here.

0:07:51

Migration to Oviedo and working with Ben Ward, Jr.

Blackwood And, [clears throat] by that time, Ben, eh—he was originally—he had an insurance business, and, uh, uh—and a real estate brokerage business, and he was getting interested into building and construction. He said, “I’ve got all these lots. I might as well build some houses.” So he offered—gave me—he said, “Why don’t you come up and join me, and we’ll form a corporation and build—build a few houses,” and the idea appealed to me, but leaving my secure place in St. Pete—position I had and so forth—uh, it took a lot of soul searching, and I guess it—I probably thought about it for two or three years ‘fore—and, in the meantime, Ben and I were still working together on—on the projects up here, and, uh, I finally made the decision. *I’ve gotta do it. I want to do it.* I’d always been interested in construction and had some experience in that, and my[?]*—my family wasn’t too eager about it at first.*

Suzanne [laughs].

Blackwood The kids—I had a, uh, son⁵ that was in the third grade and going—would be going into the fourth grade, and a daughter in the sixth grade, I believe, but they finally came around, and we moved up here, uh, second day of September, 1972. Went to work about the very next day and...

[phone rings]

Blackwood The kids start...

[phone rings]

Blackwood The kids started school the very next day after we got here, I think, and my family adjusted. They just loved Oviedo, and Sue⁶ was a city girl. Sue was from Jacksonville.

Suzanne [laughs].

Blackwood And she didn’t think she wanted to move to Oviedo from St. Petersburg. We all loved St. Petersburg. I did too, but, um, we found Oviedo to be—the people here were the most gracious, welcoming. we never felt like a stranger, and part of that maybe was, because I came here with Ben Ward, who—his dad was a celery grower, and, uh, had—had groves here in town, and Ben had some land, and—quite a bit of land in and around Oviedo, and, uh, so we—we went from there.

⁵ Scott Blackwood.

⁶ Suzanne A. Blackwood.

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We started building houses, and, uh, Ben and I were together, uh, for four years, I think, and his interests were – was on development – land development, and mine...

[phone beeps]

Blackwood Was more in construction, and I didn't have the deep pockets to go into land development [laughs], but Ben, uh – he had a vision for this – for this little town, and he – he wanted to – nothing but quality development, and he was the only one developing land in Oviedo, and he was always, I thought, a little ahead of the market, and it was, uh – it cost him financially, but he did it, and after we, uh – we split, we remained friends, and met on a weekly basis and compared what each of us was doin', until he passed away in – I think he passed away in '99, and [coughs] I never – I feel he never deserved the credit he did – he deserved – for what he did for this little town, because you can look around he – he's re – responsible for Mead Manor, Garden Grove, Whispering Oaks....

Suzanne Mmhmm.

Blackwood Uh, Hill – Hillcrest, uh, Farms – I think was the name of it.

Suzanne Uh, Windmilll...

Blackwood Windmill Farms.

Suzanne Farms.

Blackwood Those were residential, uh, develops here.

Suzanne How about Oviedo Oaks?

Blackwood No, no, he didn't – he didn't develop that.

Suzanne Hm.

Blackwood Uh, and he also started – he did some commer – a couple of commercial projects. one of 'em was, uh, Westwood Square. It was a commercial/industrial, uh, zoning area, and, uh, it's completely built out now. Uh, do you know where, uh, Toucan – what – no, it's – what's the Spanish...

Suzanne Habanero's [Mexican Grill].

Blackwood Habanero's.

Suzanne Yeah.

Blackwood You know where that is?

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Dobson I drove by it.

Blackwood That was part of Westwood Square. All of those b—back in there was developed, and there was nothing out there at the time—nothing, and nothing between there and Oviedo [*laughs*], and...

Suzanne One little gas station.

Blackwood Yeah, the—the, uh, Tiger—Tiger Station.

Suzanne Yeah.

Blackwood We called it, and, uh, then there's another, uh, I believe it's called Oviedo Office Park up to your—on [Florida State Road] 426 between Westwood Square and the city limits—what was the city limits then—or the high school, say—and it's a very nice commercial development, and it had doctor's offices, uh, and that—that type of commu—uh, development, and, like I say, we—we came here—we've been here for 43 years now, and I could never move Sue from—get her out of this house or out of this city.

Suzanne [*laughs*].

Blackwood She loves it and the kids love it.

0:13:30

Wife and children

Blackwood My daughter lives in Tallahassee, and, uh, she—she's down here quite often. My son works with me, or did work with me. He runs the business now. I'm just—I'm retired. I go in and aggravate him every day a little bit [*laughs*]. Uh, I don't know. Do you have any questions from there? I'd be glad to drive you around a little Oviedo and show you some of these projects if you have the time...

Dobson Okay.

Blackwood Or the inclination.

Dobson Sure, thank you.

Suzanne Take her to, um, Whispering Oaks, 'cuz that's...

Blackwood Yeah.

Suzanne Really...

Blackwood Well, they're all nice.

Suzanne Really, pretty, yes, Whispering Oaks has beautiful trees, but...

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Dobson Um...

Blackwood Have I missed anything Sue?

Suzanne I don't think so. I think—I was amazed at how well you [laughs]...

Blackwood Uh...

Suzanne Covered everything.

Blackwood Well, you know, that's—that's about it with, uh, my—my interests in Oviedo. It was...

Suzanne I...

Blackwood Was primarily building. I built all these years and...

0:14:29 **Population growth and Florida Technological University**

Suzanne Do you know what the population was when we moved here?

Blackwood I should've...

Suzanne [inaudible].

Blackwood Gone into that. It was about 2000, and, uh, it was about the same when I visited 10 years earlier. It hadn't grown a bit. I don't think it grew a bit from—I should've included this in it—from the '30s and on up to the '60s, and this development right here⁷ was what started the growth in Oviedo, uh, after—after, um—no. I guess it was the edges[?] of [inaudible], uh, track builders started coming into Oviedo. The, uh, uh, Jacobs brothers owned two thousand acres of land where O—where Alafaya Woods is now and that area over there, uh—Twin Rivers and that area. They sold it to a group in Atlanta in the early [19]70s, and Bob pretty well fell out of construction for a while there, and nothin', eh—I don't know if that company went bankrupt or what, but they sold it to the Anden Group, and the Anden Group is a group that developed Alafaya Woods [clears throat], and it was a little bit, uh—it was, uh, a different type development than what Ben had been developing. I think he'd be surprised today if he knew how, um—he felt that—that Oviedo never had, uh—be, uh, anything but small, rural community [inaudible] with good home sites. 'Course he knew, and I knew too, that when the university located there, sooner or later it was gonna affect Oviedo in a big way [coughs], and it did, but, uh...

Suzanne Is—is Tom Phillips next door still teaching?

⁷ Mead Manor.

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Blackwood Yeah, he's a professor over – no. he's not teaching, but he's retired.

Suzanne He's retired? Okay.

Blackwood Yeah.

Suzanne Yeah.

Blackwood That's – that's probably...

Suzanne We were surrounded by them.

Blackwood Yeah, when we first moved here, the – 'course, this was, you know – all the professors had kids and we had kids, and it's, uh, changed a couple times since then. You've got, uh, uh, older families that moved out, newer families with kids that moved in, and, uh, and, uh, and we've stuck – stuck here [*laughs*] all those years, but, um, we've seen the growth in Oviedo from two thousand to...

Suzanne Yeah.

Blackwood What? 35,000 now, probably.

Dobson Do you think it was just the university that did that, or...

Suzanne Pretty...

Blackwood Well...

Suzanne Pretty much.

Blackwood It, uh – pretty much, I think. The [Central Florida] Research Park out there – and of course, it – it – Oviedo [*clears throat*] – it grew to be a – it had a very good school system.⁸ I should've mentioned that. When – when we moved here, my son was going into the fourth grade, and we – he went to a school right across from where we lived, practically, in St Pete. He could walk to school, and they had gotten into the new, uh – let the kid reach his potential, don't push him, don't push him.

Suzanne Mmhmm.

Blackwood And...

Unidentified [*clears throat*].

Blackwood I went and talked with the teacher about it, and – “Oh, Scott's doin' fine,” And it didn't...

⁸ Seminole County Public Schools (SCPS).

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Suzanne [laughs].

Blackwood Seem to me that he was doin' fine, and she said, "Oh, no, no. he's fine." Well, when we got here, he had teachers like Ms. [Margeurite] Partin.

Suzanne Partin Elementary [School] was named after her, and she was a wonderful teacher.

Blackwood And Ms. Gore, and s—same teachers that taught Ben Ward, and Bob Ward—that group. They were still there, and she went to work on Scott and brought him up to speed. He didn't—he didn't even know his multiplication tables, and [laughs]...

Suzanne Does now [laughs].

Blackwood And all of the kids here did, but she—she put him to work on 'em and you[?]-he learned real quick[sic], and caught up, and did alright, But it—it was just a great place to raise your kids, and, uh...

0:18:39

Ben Ward's contributions to the community

Blackwood I—I just can't say enough about the—the town and about—about the guy that really got it goin'.

Suzanne Yeah.

Blackwood Ben Ward.

Suzanne I think so too.

Blackwood You get the chance to give him a plug—he's long gone. his wife still lives here in Ovi—in, uh, Mead Manor, and his kids—he has one—one kid that lives in Tusawilla and the rest of 'em are scattered around.

Suzanne Tusawilla was not here at all when we moved here.

Blackwood Well, it was too. It was one road...

Suzanne [inaudible].

Blackwood Called Dyson Road⁹ comin' off of, uh, Tuskawilla Road—Dyson—and they had...

Suzanne Dyson, yeah.

⁹ Correction: Dyson Drive.

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Blackwood They – they just started developing a few lots there. That’s a beautiful sub—one of my favorite subdivisions. The area is Tuscawilla.

0:19:24

Blackwood Construction Corporation and Lutheran Haven

Dobson Mm, what kinds of things has Blackwood Construction [Corporation] done?

Blackwood We did primarily single-family and, uh, small commercial. We did, uh, dental office for Bob Beleren over in Winter Springs[, Florida], and that sort of thing, but we built over 500 – we’ve got – I think we got...

Suzanne 563 [*laughs*].

Blackwood Well, some of ‘em weren’t – some of ‘em in the recent years have just been small jobs...

Suzanne And Lutheran Haven. mention Lutheran Haven.

Blackwood Yeah, we did – we built most of Lutheran Haven projects out of, uh – duplexes.

Suzanne You’ve probably passed Lutheran Haven on your way in. Yeah.

Dobson Could be...

Suzanne Hm.

Dobson I’m not sure.

Suzanne [*inaudible*].

Dobson I’m really not that familiar [*laughs*]...

Suzanne It’s a big Lutheran church, and they – it has a retirement for us – little du – duplexes.

Dobson Okay.

Blackwood Its’ a...

Suzanne Its’ a...

Blackwood And a – and a, uh, nursing home now. Uh, we could even – if you’ve got time, I’ll drive you all over. show you – show you a little bit of Oviedo.

Dobson Okay [*laughs*], Thank you.

Suzanne Don’t want to live here? [*laughs*].

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Dobson Yeah [laughs].

0:20:25 **Schools and desegregation in St. Petersburg**

Dobson Um, I actually moved to Orlando from St. Pete for the same reasons.

Suzanne Oh, my goodness.

Dobson [laughs].

Blackwood Oh, really?

Suzanne [laughs].

Dobson To get my son in a better school.

Suzanne Aww.

Blackwood Aw, really?

Dobson Yeah, I don't...

Suzanne Well, you know, we thought the schools there were just great, 'til we moved here.

Blackwood Well, I didn't think they were great, because I didn't think our — our boy was learning anything.

Suzanne Yeah, well...

Blackwood And — and another thing, uh, we got caught up right in the Civil Rights [Movement] — we — you know where Bay Vista Elementary [School] is?

Dobson Mmhmm.

Blackwood We lived within a block of Bay Vista, at that time, and the kids walked to school, and it was a fairly new school then, and, uh, eh, I think, 11 or — yeah, she was in the fifth grade when all the civil rights — and they started bussing kids, and she got bussed to the school right in the middle of St. — black school in the middle of St. Pete.

Suzanne I don't remember what the school was — the — the name of the school.

Blackwood I don't remember.

Suzanne Yeah.

Blackwood But [laughs] it — it, uh — it was only for that one year, and she got along fine.

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Suzanne Yeah, she did.

Blackwood She didn't have any problems, but...

Suzanne She – she made some good friends there.

Blackwood It just didn't make sense to take kids that [*laughs*] could walk to school and pay a bus to drive them somewhere else.

Suzanne [*laughs*] It was probably a good experience.

Blackwood Well, you [*inaudible*] – how – how long did you live in St. Pete?

Dobson Uh, five or six years.

Suzanne You weren't born there then?

Dobson No.

Blackwood From when to when?

Dobson Uh, it was recent. I've been in Orlando for three years.

Blackwood Three years?

Dobson Yes.

Blackwood Oh, well, you saw – you've seen the downtown area really change.

Dobson Yes, it has [*laughs*].

0:21:57 **St. Petersburg and career as a city planner**

Blackwood We – we – I graduated on Saturday night, and we packed up everything, and we had. I met Sue at [the University of] Florida her – her senior year [*laughs*], and...

Suzanne Just about.

Blackwood And, uh, we packed up everything. We – we got married, uh, my last semester there. we got married, and she'd graduated the semester 'fore I did. She's smarter than I am.

Suzanne [*laughs*].

Blackwood And we moved to St. Pete on Sunday, and I started work Monday. I was, uh – I worked as a city planner for 14 years 'fore I came here.

Dobson Wow. What kind of things did you do?

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Blackwood What kind of work?

Suzanne Yeah.

Blackwood Well, uh, we – are – are you – if you're familiar with the parks system in Oviedo – just to give you an example – uh, in, uh, St. Pete, um – Southside Park – you know the 40-acre park down Lakewood Elementary [School]?

Suzanne Mmhmm.

Blackwood And all of that? That was a plan that we came up with. Oh, oh – we developed a five-year pl – plan. We had a great city manager named Lynn [H.] Andrews, from about the time I went there until he left in '69, and he had a – a capital improvement program – a five-year, capital improvement program, and every year, they would, uh, budget certain projects, and at the end of the year, you'd see if the money was spent right on those projects [inaudible]. He – he'd project the five years another year, but he adjusted every year during that five years, and, uh, he built the, uh – had the, uh – Bayfront Center was built, the museum downtown, the waterfront – the city park of the waterfront, Northeast Park, there was all developed while he was there. The pier – inverted pier – was built, and I was all part of all that, and it was just interesting and fun, until he left, and we got another manager, and I just did not enjoy working anymore.

Suzanne Oh.

Blackwood That's how I happened to come here.

Suzanne I think that was the time to come here.

Dobson What was civil rights like in St. Pete? What was your experience with it?

Blackwood Well, uh, my main experience – it was no problem. 16th Street was kind of, uh – they[?] had their riots and things during the time.

Dobson They still do [*laughs*].

Blackwood [*laughs*] And my main memory of it – and this was why Lynn Andrews left St. Petersburg. I'm sure. In '68 or '69 when they, um, allowed public employees to be unionized – the garbage department became unionized, and they went on strike one year, and Mr. Andrews, uh, negotiated with 'em and got 'em back – not a big break in service. The very next year, they went on strike again, and he – on Monday morning, they didn't show up for work. the whole garbage department didn't show up for work, and he gave them an ultimatum. He said that "Anyone that's not back on the job by Thursday of this week will be permanently terminated – all benefits and everything." Well, they – the union didn't believe him, I guess, because a big percent – some did come back. Within a week he had completely re-staffed that from people from Georgia – different

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people looking for jobs. He completely re-staffed the garbage department, and a lot of employees lost their jobs, and from that point on, *The St. Pete Times* took up the position of the strikers. They marched on city hall every day, and he didn't yield. It's kinda like Ronald Reagan and, uh – and the, uh, uh, air [traffic] controller strike. You're probably too young to even remember that.

All [laughs].

Blackwood But he did the same thing, and, um, from that day on, anything that, that Lynn Andrews did – and I was privy to what was going on there, he would be lambasted in *The St. Pete Times* for it, and after about, uh, a year of that he, uh – he went back to Tex – he came to St. Pete from San Antonio, Texas, as the city manager, and he went back as the city manager of, uh, Austin, Texas. When he came to St. Pete, he brought his finance director, um, his assistant city manager, and the budget director – was, uh – that group came. When he left, they all went with him, except one, and he left the city and went to work for First Federal [Bank of Florida].

Dobson Wow, That's impressive. Keeping your staff with you.

Suzanne And they were good, good men, weren't they?

Blackwood Good men, all of 'em. yeah, Smart men. I often said. If he'd of run for president. I woulda...

Suzanne [laughs].

Blackwood I woulda – he – he was firm, but he was fair, But, uh, no. We – we love St. Pete. We go back every now and then, when we get a chance. [inaudible]...

Suzanne How many people weren't up there anymore?

Blackwood Yeah, most of my old buddies are gone. [laughs]. Yeah.

Dobson It's still a lovely place to visit.

Suzanne Yeah, and the downtown is so – with the waterfront – is so nice now.

Blackwood You know, I went down for a job interview, and Sue went with me, and that was before we were married. I went – I got a summer job there, and, uh [laughs], we drove into St Pete from – came down 30 – 34th Street, turned left on Central [Avenue] and got downtown, and I – we – this was in April.

Suzanne [laughs].

Blackwood We saw nothin' but green benches and gray heads, and that's quite a shock comin' from Gainesville.

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- Suzanne** From Gainesville, yeah, where everybody's young to...
- Blackwood** Where everybody's young.
- Suzanne** To where everybody's old.
- Blackwood** [laughs].
- Suzanne** [laughs] but it was a good place to live.
- Blackwood** It—yeah.
- Suzanne** [inaudible].
- Blackwood** It—it—it had something for everybody then, but the majority—I think 25 percent of the population then was 65 or older. It had, uh—I knew at the time, the population was 180 thousand when, uh, we moved there, and I think it was about 225[thousand] when we left. I don't know what it is now, but it had pretty well built out. There wasn't much developable land in St. Pete, other than up and around Whedon's[sic] Island area.
- Suzanne** What part of St. Pete did you live in?
- Dobson** Um, I lived on First Avenue North and 25th Street. So...
- Blackwood** 25th Street? [inaudible].
- Dobson** Almost downtown.
- Blackwood** Uh huh, al—yeah.
- Suzanne** We lived almost downtown when we first moved there.
- Blackwood** We had a little garage apartment, uh...
- Suzanne** Right near the hos—near Mound[?] Park Hospital.
- Blackwood** No, no. our garage apartment was, uh, up on the Northside.
- Suzanne** Oh, that one?
- Blackwood** About 26th Avenue North, and then we—we bought a, um—an old, 50-year-old apartment building down on 11th Avenue South, and I could walk to work from there—to City Hall, and we—we moved in—fixed up one unit and moved in it, and as a tenant left, we'd remodel that tenant[sic]—that unit and fix it up. Made a nice place.
- Suzanne** Was your son...

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Blackwood Oh.

Suzanne Born there?

Dobson Uh, he was born in Clearwater. I lived in Clearwater, Largo, Dunedin [*laughs*].

Suzanne Oh.

Blackwood You ever heard of Fred Marquis?

Dobson I don't think so.

Blackwood He was county manager there in Pinellas County for 25 years, I guess. I think he set a record for it, but he...

Suzanne [*laughs*].

Blackwood He—he was a planner, uh, with, uh—in St. Pete with me [*coughs*]. He came there right out of graduate school, and, uh, worked there, and we became good friends, but I hadn't been in touch with him for years. Uh, he's—he's—he's since retired.

End of Interview