

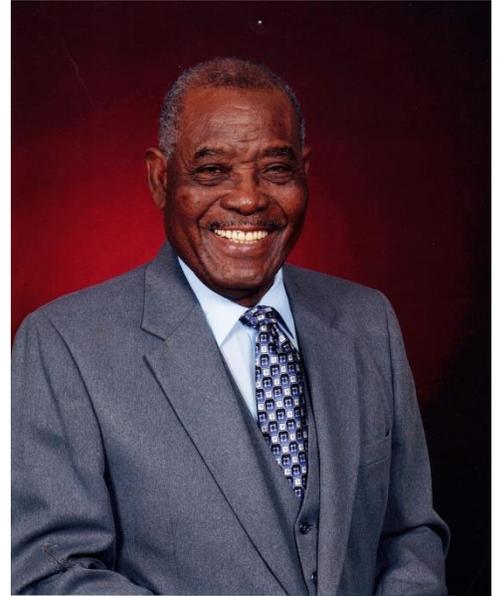
**Sarasota Oral History Project  
New College of Florida, Fall 2016**

**Interview with:** Robert Taylor

**Date:** November 2016

**Interviewer:** Christina Harn

*Robert Taylor moved to Sarasota when he was 13, residing in Overtown and graduating from Booker High School. He later graduated from Morehouse College after finishing his service in the Army during WWII. Upon returning to Sarasota, he became the first full time employee of The Newtown Recreation Center, known to locals as "The Rec." Directing the center and its programs over his 36 year career (1950-1986), he helped cement The Rec as a safe community space for Black residents of Newtown and the larger Sarasota area, through periods of profound change and conflict related to segregation. The Newtown Recreation Center was rededicated as The Robert L. Taylor Community Complex Center in 2005, and it is now a state of the art, 15-acre campus of sports, play and learning.*



Christina (C): So should we just start at the beginning?

Robert L. Taylor (R): Wherever.

C: Where were you born?

R: I was born in Winter Garden, Florida. I never remember living there, but that's where I was born. But where I lived, as far as I know, was in Zellwood, Florida, a little town just north of there, so it was always called "Zellwood" at that time.

C: So you were in Zellwood your whole childhood?

R: Well until I was about 13. Then I moved to Sarasota.

C: And what were those younger years like? Before you moved at 13?

R: Well, we were country. We were out there in the country, and the whole country, I guess, was like one unit. We all, everybody knew everybody, all the families knew everybody, and so we just supported each other. And we... there weren't a lot of problems. It was a lot of fun. Hard work, because we had an orange grove, and I guess you would call it almost a farm. We grew our own food and everything. So it was hard work at times, but we got to play a lot too.

C: So who did you live with?

R: My grandparents.

C: And what did they do?

R: Well, they were, my grandfather I think I told you he was a picker, would pick fruit, that was about the biggest thing in Orange County at the time. And my grandmother stayed at home to take care of the house. We had this big two-story house with a lot of uncles and aunts and cousins all living in there together, so.

C: So how many people, about, lived in the house with you?

R: Oh goodness. (Laughs) From the time I was a baby, between like 10 or 12, or something there around. Sometimes more.

C: And, did you like growing up in that house?

R: Well I had no choice. (Laughs). Yeah, it was a lot of fun and I liked that.

C: What was the move like? When you came to Sarasota?

R: It was different all together. I actually, Sarasota was the first time I ever recognized racism because we were always a close knit community. We never had to go outside, we took care of our own, raise your own food and all this, so we were pretty much isolated. I got here, things were different.

C: And who did you live with in Sarasota?

R: My mother. She was here all the time, she couldn't find work up in Zellwood, so she was down here.

C: Was it just the two of you?

R: My sister came with me, but she didn't stay long. She went back to Zellwood. She liked the country, so she went back. (Laughs.)

C: And what did you do in Sarasota?

R: Well, I went to school mainly 'cause as long as I went to school and got good grades, I didn't have to do too too much.

C: What was your school like?

R: Well when I first came, the school was across town, and then I guess after the first or second year after I moved in here they moved the school to Newtown. And we walked to school. There were no busses. We would walk to school and walk back home, so. School was good, we could

have a lot of fun, and ah, you had to walk though (laughs), you had to walk.

C: And where did you live?

R: Over on, I guess it was 12th street at the time, and they changed the streets around now. It was 12th and I think it's 6th street now, but just off Central Avenue.

C: And did you like living there?

R: Yes. Yeah, it was a nice little neighborhood.

C: And what did you do for fun?

R: Well, at that time you made your own fun, 'cause we didn't have recreation facilities like you have now. If you had a ball, someone could... you'd get a pick-up game, whatever. We used to play a lot of horseshoes, and just anything we could do to stay busy. 'Cause we didn't go back home. We stayed out all day playing, then you would go back home in the evening.

C: And did you like studying?

R: Not really, but I knew I had to. (Laughs) My mother, and my grandmother too, they didn't believe in C's because, I wasn't average, you not supposed to be average.

C: So did you still get to go back and visit with your grandparents?

R: Well my grandmother had moved down to Bradenton at that time and my granddad died. That's why we, when he died, we came to Sarasota, but after that I didn't see them anymore.

C: So you said that Sarasota was the first time that you experienced racism?

R: Yeah.

C: So what was it like, having that transition?

R: Well, it's something, it's new to you, you're just not used to it. Well I guess it might have been in Zellwood, too, but we never had to come in contact with that much. So, it just was reality once I got here, that it was. You go downtown, and you have different signs: "Colored," "White," and all. Some places you couldn't even go in. It was a big difference.

C: And did your mother prepare you for that?

R: No. (Laughs.) Over the years you find out, you know you find out over the years, didn't take long to find out.

C: And what was sort of your reaction to segregated Sarasota?

R: Well I guess you have no choice, you get used to it, you can't change it, so you just... you go some place you can't go in, and you just accept that. There isn't anything you could do.

C: And what was your favorite subject in high school?

R: Now, I think I liked literature better than anything else. I still do.

C: And did you have any people who inspired you when you were growing up?

R: Well, we had a lot of good teachers who really inspired us. I remember we had Professor Haysley. He was, he really talked to us about the future of our lives and prepared us for a lot of things, what we had to experience later on.

C: So did you go to Booker?

R: Yes. I graduated from Booker.

C: And what did you want to do when you graduated?

R: Well, I really thought I wanted to go into business course, and I did until I ran into business math. (Laughs.) But after [high school] I went to Morehouse College in Atlanta. Then after the first, well I didn't finish the first semester because I was drafted in the Army. So then I spent 3 years in the Army. Then I came back to Morehouse and finished.

C: And how did you feel when you were drafted?

R: Again, it's something you can't do anything about. Nobody wants to go, but then you have to, so...

C: And did you think about trying to defer the draft at all?

R: No. I could have if I wanted to go into the ministry, which I knew I wasn't going to do. So, I could have declared out for the Ministry, I could have stayed out, but I wasn't going to. I knew I wasn't going to be a preacher or anything. (Laughs.)

C: And we don't have to talk about this if you don't want to, but what was it like being drafted or sent overseas?

R: Well, it's something you can't do anything about so you just accept it. You don't like it, but... you know Army life is not for everybody. It definitely wasn't for me (Laughs.) But you have to learn to cope wherever you are, so it's something you get used to.

C: And what did you do in the Army?

R: Well, we started out, I was a radio operator, but then was in the artillery, but then when we got overseas they put us on the trucking outfits. I drove a truck the whole time I was overseas. I learned to drive on a two and a half ton truck (Laughs.)

C: You'd never driven before?

R: I was only 17 or 18! Nobody had cars at 18. (Laughs.) In fact, Black families didn't have a lot of cars, period.

C: Where were you stationed?

R: Well I started out in Oklahoma, then from Oklahoma to Texas, then to North Africa, then to Italy.

C: And did you make any friends with the people you were stationed with?

R: Oh yeah, we were all friendly.

C: And did you keep in touch with anyone after?

R: Barely. I haven't seen many. I saw one person I was in service with. In fact when I was over in Naples, Italy, one of my schoolmates from Sarasota was there, but we never got to meet because either I'd be going north and he'd look for me, or he'd be gone when I was looking for him, so we never did catch up with each other. But we were only a few miles apart, but just never got together.

C: Do you feel like your experience in the army changed what you wanted to do with your life? (10 minute mark)

R: Well in the army, I guess there had to be a change because really I didn't know what I wanted to do when I left high school. I think probably most people don't really know when they leave high school. But I had to, you have to choose something, so I chose something. But I was more focused after I came back. Because my mind wasn't really on school until I came back out of service, and by that time I guess I was disciplined enough to find out what I wanted to do.

C: And were the units still segregated at the time?

R: Yes.

C: How did you feel about serving in a segregated unit?

R: Well, here again, what can you do? You know, we had our friends, and there were some whites and Blacks who were friends, but it was just that you were in a different unit. You couldn't join that unit, you'd stay in the segregated unit.

C: I know that sometimes the Army would send non-white units into more dangerous conditions. Did you ever experience that?

R: No, we were never in a combat area. We were always delivering supplies and what not, so we were just driving all over Italy and North Africa. The combat unit was always further up ahead of us. We were still in North Africa when they were fighting in Italy, then went on up

when they were further North. We didn't move to Naples until they were up past Rome fighting, so we never got that close to combat.

C: Were most of the people you went to high school with also drafted?

R: I imagine most of them that age were drafted.

C: And were you able to keep in touch with your family at all?

R: Oh yeah, I kept in touch with my family.

C: When did you get back from the Army?

R: I was there three years, in the Army three years, so I came back in '46 I think it was.

C: And you returned to Morehouse?

R: Yes.

C: How did you like Atlanta?

R: It was a big city, and I don't like big cities (Laughs). No, I really didn't like Atlanta at all.

C: So you said you were studying business at first at Morehouse? And when you came back what were you studying?

R: Well I wound up with a degree in Economics and Business Administration, and I never did end up using either one really, but that's what I majored in.

C: And what kind of activities were you doing at Morehouse or while you were at Morehouse?

R: I tried a lot. I tried track, but then I got hurt so I didn't go back on the track. I was too small for anything else athletic (Laughs.) So I, I was mainly a student, after I got hurt doing track I didn't do anything else.

C: Did you do track while you were in high school?

R: No.

C: Did you do any sports while you were in high school?

R: I wasn't good at it. (Laughs.)

C: Did you have any part time jobs while you were a student?

R: In high school?

C: Or college, both.

R: No. Well I was in the campus dining room for a while to supplement my income, but other than that, just studying.

C: And did you make many friends at Morehouse?

R: Oh yeah. Lots of friends.

C: What were some of your closest friends like?

R: Well there one, I think my best friend was from South Carolina, and we stayed friends until he passed. And he and his wife were friends, but she got sick. But I kept up with him and his family.

C: And were most of your friends also studying economics?

R: No, they were all music and whatever, there were all different.

C: Did you enjoy music a lot?

R: Music? I always enjoyed music a lot. I couldn't play anything, never could play an instrument but I always loved music.

C: Did you go out to music clubs?

R: No, we had a sorority that invited us over for dances, and we had fraternity dances so that was probably our biggest activity.

C: Did you join a fraternity?

R: Yes.

C: What fraternity were you in?

R: Alpha Phi Alpha.

C: And did you enjoy that?

R: Yes, yes.

C: Did you live with them? Did you have a fraternity house?

R: We didn't have a fraternity house, no. You lived in a regular dorm with everybody.

C: And why did you want to join a fraternity?

R: Well if you didn't join a fraternity, you wasn't a part of the social life. In Atlanta you had about six schools there, and by the time the sororities and fraternities got invited, if you weren't a part of it there just wasn't any room. You had to be part of it.

C: And did you do activities with your fraternity?

R: Yes, whatever they did we all did.

C: What kinds of things did you do?

R: They had different kinds of things. They had a lot of community work, kinds of drives and food banks, so there were a lot of activities we had to take part in.

C: Do you remember any specific events that were successful or particularly meaningful to you?

R: Not offhand, no. We just did a lot of... most of them were successful, but there wasn't a special one. We did a lot of different things over the years.

C: What do you feel you learned the most about at Morehouse?

R: I guess mostly I learned about me, because it took me awhile to get focused on what I wanted most. It just, you know, you leave high school and you think you want to do all things, then you get out and you see what the limitations are, then you change, and you have to settle on something. You have to have a major, so you pick one. Actually, when I came here, came back [to Sarasota], I was intending to go back [to college] while I still had time on my GI bill to go back for another year. Then everything changed all together, because I got involved in the recreation program here.

C: And how did you get involved in the recreation program?

R: Well at that time, recreation was new. There was no such thing as recreation really. I think maybe one college, or two colleges, had a recreation major available. But we just got a City Manager from down in Miami Beach, and he was much more advanced. And at this time Sarasota was just this sleepy little town, and they didn't have anything. But he came, and he said he wanted to establish recreation in Newtown and then in Overtown too. So he opened one for Whites and one for Blacks. The one for Blacks was out here and then the one in Sarasota down by the waterfront.

C: And how did you join in with recreation in Sarasota?

R: Well, we... actually, it just was for the beginning of it, because before that I think that the Whites had Lido beach, that was all they had, and there was a little sandwich shop down on

Main Street, I think the whites would go. But we had dances at the school mostly, the schools provided most of the activities and social things.

C: And the beaches were segregated?

R: Yes.

C: Were you involved in the desegregation protests?

R: No. I was fully engaged in what I was doing here. In fact, they built the swimming pool here hoping that would keep Blacks from going to Lido and the other beaches. 'Course it didn't. The kids loved it, but the adults never did use it that much, so...

C: I heard that there was a caravan that went from the opening of the pool back to the beach to protest?

R: Well they did a lot of protests, but I never was involved in protests so much. My hands were full right here (Laughs.) I had everything I needed, the time I had was filled right here.

C: Where was the original Rec Center that you were working at located?

R: Right here, in the same area here. Originally it was a USO building. It was built for the USO to entertain the soldiers. They were just building the airport near for the Air Base, where the airport is now. They were just clearing that up, so then when the soldiers came in, they came to this USO. It was just a small building, probably could have put it inside the auditorium here. (Laughs.)

C: So right after you graduated from Morehouse you came back to Sarasota?

R: Yeah.

C: And how soon after coming back to Sarasota did you start working at the Rec Center?

R: I finished in June and maybe by that Fall I had already started the program.

C: And what made you interested in applying for this?

R: I didn't apply really; the City Manager contacted me. It was my idea to work the summer then go back to school. That's what I was saying, but it didn't work out that way. I got interested, and I just stayed.

C: And why did the City Manager contact you?

R: Well I guess he contacted others who had graduated, but no one would accept it.

C: He wanted someone with a college degree?

R: I guess he did. But, (Laughs) I guess ones he contacted had also just finished college that year.

C: And what was your relationship working with him like?

R: With him? Oh we talked every day. He was very interested, and he also had a Supervisor of Parks and Recreation that was very interested. But things changed when, I think after about 10 years maybe, he went to Miami, the Parks and Recreation man. He went to Miami and had a heart attack and died. And things changed from there. They were never the same from there because they were really more interested in advancing everything.

C: So what changed after he left?

R: Well, when you get people who don't know, at that time really not too many people did know about recreation, and I had ten years experience on them, so I, it was, I guess, I didn't advance like they told me I would. I was committed to doing it, but after the Parks and Recreation man died and the City Manager got busy with other activities, I just fell through the cracks somewhere in there. I didn't get the advancement I should have gotten.

C: Did you think you were going to take his position as managing?

R: No, no, that was never any thought about that.

C: So what was the original center when it opened like?

R: It took about five years to get it established, really. We had to go through the community, through the schools, everyday you're going from place to place trying to contact the right people. And then, the USO... the building had a bad reputation for young girls because some of them, young girls, they got with these soldiers and the parents didn't want their young ladies coming to the center until we could ensure that they were protected, that we would look out for them. So it took about five years.

C: So there were still army people in the building?

R: No, the building had been empty a long time before that. And the community had been using it for different activities.

C: So what was that process like, trying to get it open?

R: Well, there wasn't any process because the city owned the building (Laughs). It was just a matter of us getting in contact with the public to get them to start seeing the benefits of it.

C: Were you trying to fundraise or just raise awareness of it?

R: No, mostly just raise awareness. We had the funds we needed at that time.

C: And how did you go about that, raising awareness?

R: I visited schools a lot. Booker, mainly, because that was where I spent a lot of time, at Booker, with the teachers and students. And then up on Main St. At the time it was 27th street, and I knew there was one guy especially, he knew who to contact throughout the community. So he became my mentor. He was my barber, and he always helped me wherever I needed. At the time I didn't have any transportation, so if I had a meeting uptown he drove me, and he would take part in the meeting. So he really, he started a lot of the baseball program for the youth, he worked with the baseball, and he started a lot of the Christmas party and Thanksgiving, he always provided for the kids. At the time they had a pretty good business association that contributed most of the funds for that.

C: What was his name?

R: Thomas Robert. Thomas, this new field is named for him. It took us a few years to try and get that because we tried to get something in his honor. And they kept naming different streets and what not. So finally we, I think about the same time we dedicated this building, I got to talk with the guy who was acting as the Recreation and Parks, even though he was Public Rec. And I talked to him, and the next day they had a sign up with his name on it, then they finally built this field.

C: And was he a baseball player himself?

R: He was a minor league baseball player round here. There were two teams, Sarasota and Bradenton had, but they played together sometimes. It was the Nine Devils for Bradenton, but Sarasota and Bradenton both played, and he played on that team. And he was very interested in getting the kids into baseball.

C: So what year... was there an opening ceremony when the center was all ready?

R: Which one, the first one?

C: Yes, the first one.

R: No, there wasn't. No, it just started off with two people, me and a janitor (Laughs). So there wasn't, no. We just started,

C: And what was it like when it first opened?

R: Well, it, we had trouble getting kids. Well at the time, it was surprising to me because, at the time when we came along, everybody danced. But these kids couldn't dance. And the first dance we had, the girls sat on one side and the boys sat on the other. And we found out, the kids couldn't dance! We had to have dance classes, and teach them how to dance. And once they learned the basics, they went on from there, so everything grew then.

C: So was that some of the first events you scheduled?

R: Yeah. The dances were the first.

C: So how old were you when you started working here?

R: When I started working here? I think about 25.

C: After the dances, what were some of the next programs?

R: We finally added Arts & Crafts, and all kinds of...We didn't have any kind of hired staff, so we had a lot of volunteer people who came in. Teachers from Booker came out and did a lot of Arts and Crafts. And then we did games and swim meets and all that after the pool was built, lots of different things.

C: And what were the usual ages of people that would visit?

R: Mostly kids. Very few adults.

C: So kids between what ages usually?

R: All ages.

C: And what about the volunteers?

R: Well, we had a lot of volunteers from the school, a lot of teachers did volunteer. And there was one man especially who helped over the years, his name was Louis Olee. He was out here on the corner. And at the time we had to do the ball fields. We had two ball fields, one on either side that had to be done, and he would come out and help with the ball fields. Then later on he volunteered as a lifeguard and helped me with the life guarding. He was one of the mainstays and helped in a lot of different directions.

C: And were you participating in all the events as well?

R: How do you mean, participating?

C: I mean, were you helping run all the dance classes and everything?

R: I practically programmed everything.

C: What was an average day like for you?

R: Ok, when the pool opened I had to be certified as a water safety instructor. I spent a week in Nashville, at the Red Cross and I passed that, and was qualified for that. Then the pool couldn't

open until we had a certified pool operator. So I spent a week on that, so I was certified as a Pool Operator, and I certified as a professional Recreator later on. So I had all these credits, but it didn't help the salary, it didn't help me at all (Laughs). It just meant more work really.

C: So, I'm sorry if this is rude, but did you feel like you were paid adequately at all for the work you put in.

R: No. No, nowhere near.

C: It sounds like you were working far more than forty hours a week.

R: Forty hours? (Laughs) You're lucky if you only work forty hours. Because when the swimming pool started, if something went bad, the Center had to be open, if you had to spend all night fixing it, you did it. There wasn't no schedule I could do, it depended on how things went, so the swimming pool was the biggest thing. You had to be almost 24 hours monitoring.

C: So how many hours a week do you feel like you were spending there?

R: (Laughs) That's something I never thought about (Laughs). You don't vacation because you had to be available, someone is calling you all the time, even on vacation. So you never had any time off.

C: What did the center mean to you? Spending so much time there?

R: Well it was something that had to be done. Of course my kids, they always said I spent more time with other people's kids than I did with them. But, I think they understood. They didn't come down so much. My youngest son, he liked to swim, he was in the pool all the time, but most of the time they said they didn't want to see me 24 hours a day (Laughs).

C: So you said that the very first year it was hard to start getting kids to come? R: Yeah.

C: When did it start becoming easier?

R: Well, we finally put in a rule that if young ladies came into an activity, they couldn't leave, the parents had to come pick them up. And then they let them come in, the girls. The boys always came (Laughs). But if you don't have the girls, the boys don't keep coming. And so, once they got that cleared up, and the parents knew they were going to be safe and couldn't come out of the building till they picked them up, that was a big help.

C: So was that still within the first year?

R: Yeah, maybe the first two or three years.

C: How many people would be coming to the center, like every week.

R: I don't know, after about the third or fourth year we had all the activities were filled, but it

wasn't a big building so it didn't take much to fill it anyways (Laughs). But it was always at capacity, all the dances. Then after the football games, Booker held their dances here too, and that was a big help.

C: Did you have bands play at the dances, or just record players?

R: We had DJ's come in mostly. Because at that time DJ's were really popular. They would come in from Clearwater, Texas, all different places, some real, real good DJs.

C: So what kind of music was it usually?

R: I have no idea (Laughs). I think when it first started I chose the music, which I didn't know anything about music, and the kids, the teenagers... it was awful as far as they were concerned. So then they started picking what music (Laughs).

C: And what kinds of music did you like to listen to? Or do like to listen to?

R: I listen to all kinds of music. All music is good to me, depending on what mood I'm in, I guess. I like different types.

C: And earlier you said that the Recreation Center was something that had to be done, a responsibility. Why do you feel like it was necessary to have a recreation center? Could you elaborate on that?

R: Well, when I grew up, we didn't have anything organized, and you had to make your own fun. But kids always want a place to have fun, so it was necessary that we could organize it and have it in a place where it's safe, and we could control it. Rather than out in the streets where they're playing ball, and running everywhere, and doing everything. And here, we could control all their activities and actions well.

C: So you said it was mostly kids that used the recreation center?

R: Yes.

C: Did that continue the whole time you worked there?

R: No, finally we had adult nights, and they enjoyed that. They started coming. We had a very good adult swimming program, mostly women. Volleyball they enjoyed, the adults, then we had the tennis courts. So they started coming in.

C: And what did you do on the adult nights?

R: Go home, probably (Laughs). Sometimes I would stay around, but by that time... this is the third building. After the first one they had, I think it must have been 2002, somewhere in there,

they built a new, much larger building. When they built a new larger building, we got a complete staff, we had a staff then. So then we could do more programming. By that time, except for the pool, I was mostly doing programming. I would program for the summer, and on the day that program started, I would be programming for the fall, and I was continuing to program year round really. I didn't like it because at this time I couldn't participate too much because I was Supervising, and I couldn't get in to play with them.

C: Did you always like working with kids?

R: Well, I never wanted to teach, I never even applied for a teaching certificate because I didn't want to teach. Because, first of all, you're too restricted on what you can teach, and I didn't like that. And, the kids were beginning to, I guess what we see now-a-days, it was the beginning of what they were starting to do, and it was hard to supervise them. And by this time the parents didn't have the control they used to have. So really it was really hard on us. But I always did wind up teaching somewhere. When I retired here, I spent three years down at the Helen Payne daycare with a bunch of three and a half, four and a half year olds, about ten of them. I have a picture of one of the groups. I don't know where they are now, but there was about ten I had. I was there about three years. Then when I moved to Bradenton, I worked with an afterschool program. So, I've pretty much been with kids all the time.

C: So from when the center opened in the 1950's, were you the only one working at that center the whole time?

R: Yeah.

C: Other than the janitor?

R: Well the janitor, he by that time, I don't know if he was still there. He was much older than I was to start with but, I was probably the only one that was still there from the original.

C: Did you ever get a staff or anyone working under you for that first center?

R: Well, we established a library program here for one thing. So then we hired and trained a person to run the library. But we didn't have much of a staff at all, never got one. The second building, we got staff.

C: And when you say "we," were there other people helping you? Did you have consistent volunteers that helped?

R: No, when they built the second building they hired two outside maintenance people and one inside, so three. We had maybe six part-time attendants so we had plenty of help.

C: So the first building it opened around 1955?

R: 1950.

C: So until 1966 were you the only one hired to work?

R: I think the librarian was paid, there weren't really a lot of paid staff, just volunteers.

C: So that's 16 years where you were almost single handedly running the center?

R: (Laughs.) Well, a long time.

C: Did you have consistent volunteers that would function as a kind of informal board or informal group?

R: No, we just got volunteers wherever we could. We had trouble when they built the pool. We could have hired three people as lifeguards if they wanted to take the training. And the Red Cross would provide the training, so all they had to do was go to Nashville and take the course. And I got one person to go. So that means I had one person to help with the life guarding and the teaching. Then later on we did get one attendant who was also certified and then one of the coaches from Riverview, we went to Jacksonville and he got certified. So then we had more help.

C: Did you feel that the recreation center got enough support from the county? Is that who managed it?

R: No, it was the city. Well, recreation never was all that well funded, either white or black, there just wasn't any money for Recreation. I always said when the pie was split up and pieces were going, just a little piece left was for recreation (Laughs). So, that's just about the way I saw it. But no, it really wasn't ever funded the way it should have been funded. The county was much better funded, but see the city, I guess about the year after I left the county took over recreation and parks and also the fire department and some others because the city sued them. They were charging the city taxes for something they weren't benefitting from. So the city sued them, and that's where, with the repayment they took over the parks and rec and fire department, and they ran that.

C: So you said you weren't very involved in protesting yourself?

R: No.

C: But were some of the youth that came to the center, were they?

R: Well I guess some of the kids did, a lot of the high schoolers were involved in protesting.

C: Protesting at the beach or other places as well?

R: Probably other places as well, because they had the sit-ins, the lunch counter sit-ins and all that kind of stuff going on. And usually a lot of the high schoolers participated in those. But it wasn't as bad as it was in some cities, though, because in Sarasota, even though it was segregated, it wasn't as bad as even like Manatee. Manatee was segregated much longer than Sarasota was. Because Sarasota began to grow as a metropolitan area, and Manatee was still a farming area for a long time, so the change came at a little bit different time, at different speeds.

C: How have you seen Sarasota change?

R: Well first of all, when I go down there now, I'm lost (Laughs). Are you familiar with Sarasota at all?

C: A little bit.

R: You know where Myrtle Street is? That was as far as the highway went. 301 wasn't there at the time. Myrtle was the north end, and after Myrtle there was a cow pasture. So that's how it was. And where this is now, on 301 back almost where the swimming pool is now was a garbage dump. That's how they built it, because it was a swamp land, and they built it up with the garbage, and then they had to sit for 7 years before they could use it.

C: And you said earlier there weren't many cars in Sarasota when you were growing up?

R: Well, Blacks didn't have many cars. A few did, but it wasn't like it is now where everybody's got a car.

C: What did your mother do for work while you were growing up?

R: She was a pastry chef down at one of the restaurants downtown.

C: When you came back from Morehouse, did you move back in with your mother or live some place else?

R: No, I stayed with her.

C: How long did you live with your mother?

R: Until she remarried and moved to Cleveland. I can't remember what year that was, but it was after I finished college they moved to Cleveland.

C: Did she ever get to see the center?

R: No. Just the very first one, after that she was gone.

C: How did she feel about you working so hard at the Center?

R: Well by this time she had moved to Cleveland (Laughs). So she didn't know that much about how hard I worked. By this time I was married and lived right down the street about a block from the center, and they were the ones who... (Laughs) I mean, they didn't suffer because they were always well fed and had a place to live, we were taking good care of them, but it just was sometimes you couldn't be home for dinner. Usually I was here at the center.

C: How did you meet your wife?

R: We grew up together, about in the same neighborhood.

C: What was your wife's name?

R: Bernice. Bernice Gillespie.

C: When did the two of you get married?

R: My last year of college she became pregnant, and then we married. My family didn't want me to get married. They wanted me to stay in school because I had one more year to go. But I grew up, I never knew my dad. I have never seen a picture of my dad. And I didn't want my kids to grow up that way. So it made it a little harder, but still we made it ok.

C: Was your wife also in Atlanta in school?

R: No, she was going to Florida A&M.

C: How many children did you have?

R: Four.

C: And what are their names?

R: Well, my son Robert, he passed about 2 months ago. And I got a daughter Shirley, then I got one, Louis, out in Africa doing medicine, and Anthony's down on the East Coast. So they're all scattered around.

C: And you said they didn't always go to the Center?

R: No, they didn't. Well, Shirley, one summer she worked here during the summer... But the rest of them, they didn't (Laughs). In fact, growing up they were satisfied to be home by themselves, they didn't want to come out. They were just happy to be at home together. They got along with each other.

C: Did they ever come to the dances or those kinds of things?

R: No. I think they weren't too much of big dancers either (Laughs).

C: What were some of your favorite activities that happened at the Center?

R: Well, I didn't participate in too much of it, after we got the second building especially. But, we had one, I think it was four-square that was very popular. I think we borrowed that from Tampa. Because we went to different Centers, and whatever we thought we could adapt we took and brought back with us from different conferences. And that was one that kids would be in line, waiting to participate in, because it was a real fast game. They would be in line, waiting to play, then keep going. And we had a trampoline at that time that we later deemed was too dangerous and took it out, but that was a favorite. And we had, Bill Blackburn, he took over arts & crafts. He had been down at the other Center, and for some reason I think he couldn't get along with them. So they sent him out here, and really thought he was quick, but he really enjoyed it so much out here because he said he just loved it. He did the arts and crafts, lots of pottery, then he formed a little band with ukuleles for the kids. And he was real popular out here, too, so he was a big help to us.

C: When did this happen?

R: Oh this was in the second phase, in the second building. Nothing really outstanding took place in the first. We didn't have a lot, just the basics.

C: Did you say that you made a makeshift field for the first building, or volunteers build a field?

R: No, the city built a little league field on this end, for all the kids to play baseball on this end. I think the high school used to use this field, and then little league took over that field completely. We had an outdoor basketball court, which was the most popular thing because we didn't have the gym at that point. Booker had this championship team, and all those players learned how to play basketball down on that outdoor court.

C: Did any people that played on these courts that go on to play professionally or in college?

R: Well, we had, everybody I think knew Howard Porter. He went to Villanova. And several others went up, Dune Cook, and another at A&M. A lot of them did go on and play at football or at college.

C: And what kind of rules, or how did you make sure the Center was a safe and productive space, especially when it was just you?

R: Well we never had a problem. You could always send them home for two weeks. See, they didn't want to be home, especially in the summertime, and all your friends are down here. So, they would be pretty much in line with that rule. Suspension was the thing.

C: And what kind of relationship did you form with some of these children?

R: Well, they say I was mean but (Laughs) they still say that. In fact, they say my daughter is mean because when they find out she was my daughter, they say, well that's why she's so mean. And since I've seen them, they've come to me after they grow up and thank me for the discipline they got. So, they benefitted from it.

C: So did it become mostly sports at a certain point that would happen or...?

R: Well, sports were always a big part of it, a big part. And swimming, the pool opening took over a lot of the summer time, most of the activities.

C: And when did the pool open?

R: I think it was 1960.

C: And what was that like, negotiating its open?

R: Well, like I said, when we were first scheduling the opening, they said we could open until we had, first, the Red Cross was in charge of the swimming so they said we had to have certified instructor over the pool. Then after I came back with my certification, the state said you need to have a certified operator before you can open it. So we had to go through all those steps to get the pool open.

C: And whose idea was it to build the pool?

R: The city did it, I believe. They built it for the mode of keeping Blacks from the beach. That's why it was built. They never admitted that, but that's what it was (Laughs).

C: So how did the community feel about the pool opening?

R: Well, they knew why it was built. That kept some of the adults from coming, but the kids always came. When we first opened, they didn't have a limit on capacity and I, I think you probably could walk across the pool and never touch the water there were so many people in there. But then after a while they did put a limit on how many people could be in there.

C: And how big was the first pool?

R: How big was the pool? I think it was 25 meters by what, 25, and had a deep end with a diving board, so it was a T-shape so people could dive in.

C: And was it scary being a lifeguard during the summer when there were so many people in the pool?

R: It was pretty much under control. Because, well first of all, they couldn't go into the deep end until they proved they could swim the length of the pool. And of course, that made them want to learn to swim because otherwise they couldn't go into the deep end. So, it was pretty much under control.

C: Did you teach people how to swim.

R: Yes, I taught swimming, I taught all the junior life-saving and the senior life-saving. We taught the classes, but we didn't test. The Red Cross would do the testing. We never had one that failed over there (Laughs).

C: And how many people do you think you taught how to swim?

R: I don't know (Laughs). I have no idea. I was at a friend's wake when a friend, a guy I used to work with, his son came to me, and he told his mother, "Mr. Taylor taught me how to swim!" And I couldn't really remember him coming through, but we always had a full swimming class. I don't know how many I taught.

C: How many years did you teach swimming?

R: Well, from when the pool was open in '60 to when I retired.

C: And when did you retire?

R: '86.

C: So you retired in '86 but did you remain involved with the center?

R: No.

C: What did you do after you retired?

R: Well I went down to Helen Payne's school for about three years, then I moved to Bradenton and I worked mostly with the ....**PAIR**.... program for 3 or 4 years after at the junior high school.

C: And who took over the center after you retired?

R: Carl East. No well first of all, Rick Thomas, he was one of the guys I taught recreation. When he grew up, he grew up at the center. He was the first after me, then later on Carl East took over, and he just retired just before this new building was opened.

C: And how have you seen it grow?

R: This program here? Well I haven't been too close to it, but I talk to folks quite a bit, and they were satisfied that at one time they had something like 2,000 on the roll. Not only just this area, but down in Venice and Bradenton... they are all coming to use this center. And the churches use it. It is pretty well used.

C: Do you have any memories of definitive moments of when the first center was getting more

popular?

R: I think the only reason I stayed on was because my mentor, he always told me quitting wasn't an option (Laughs). Because he was interested in it, and he wasn't going to let me quit. So somehow I didn't have a choice but to keep going (Laughs).

C: And who was your mentor?

R: That's the one who was my barber. Yeah, he was here all the time.

C: You said you didn't play sports much in high school or college?

R: I tried, but I wasn't any good. (Laughs).

C: Did you start doing more sports when you were at the recreation center?

R: Well, I mean sometimes we would have to help play with them to keep them going, but I never was very much good at athletics (Laughs). I tried football, but I was just too small. At that time I weighed about 140 pounds, and everyone on the team was bigger than me. Then you played teams like Tampa, Bartow, and they had all these huge people (Laughs.) It just wasn't for me.

C: And the things you did in your career, are there any accomplishments that stand out that you feel particularly proud of? Because I know plenty of people are proud of you.

R: Well, I always think that I'm happy for my family more so than myself, because they endured a lot about me not being home with them a lot of the time. And when there was talk about naming the place [the Robert L. Taylor Center], they really loved for it much more than I thought about it. So I feel real good for them. They are really proud of it, so...

C: And you said that you were pretty disciplined with the kids at the Center. Were you trying to teach them anything specific?

R: Yeah, kids come from broken homes, and they come in, and they do what they want at home, and they thought to do the same. We had to really tell them you can't do that. We learned discipline was a part of trying to train them for later on in life. Because if you aren't disciplined, you can't get too far, you can't get too much. So yeah, discipline was a big part of what we did for them.

C: So you said someone who you taught to swim took over your job at the Center?

R: No, the one who took after my job was raised at the Center, he grew up here. And in fact, I suggested to him... he didn't know what to do, and I suggested to him to go into recreation. By this time, the University of Florida had a recreations degree program, so he went to University of Florida, and he graduated with a degree in Recreations, then he came back.

C: So you said you didn't have didn't have a formal training or degree and this was a completely

ground-up operation?

R: There was no degree available. And that hurt me too, because after about 10 or 12 years, I had the experience, but now they want people with a degree. Even though, when we went to get certifications for running recreations, I was the only one who passed the course, and I was the only one who didn't have a degree. But see, wouldn't nobody hire you without the degree. So that hurt me too.

C: Did you have supportive bosses from Sarasota City, or not so much?

R: I knew one or two really well who were supportive but there were other sorts who were, you know, people who say one thing, but their actions... And then, the people, especially kids and their families, really took to liking the place. But when I came back to Sarasota, see, I graduated from Booker in 1942, I went to Morehouse, then the service, then back to Morehouse. So by the time I graduated from Morehouse, I was an outsider. And they didn't want an outsider. These are not the people, but the so called "leaders," they were always against me. So actually, I had nobody, no advocates to help me do anything, I was out there, left out on my own. So that hurts when you do that. You have to have community leaders who...

C: This was from Black community leaders in Sarasota?

T: Yeah.

C: Do you feel like after some time went by they started supporting you?

R: I don't think they ever did (Laughs). I know they didn't. There was, one of the, a fellow who was once at the newspaper, I think he started that Temple, what is it over there. And his little girl was in Helen Payne, in my class, and we got to know each other. And he told me a lot of stuff that had been going on, against me, what they had done. I don't tell them, they don't know I know, but a lot of stuff they did to try and get me fired.

C: Why do you think that happened?

R: They wanted their own people to run the program.

C: So how did you manage to keep going without that support?

R: Well, they had no options (Laughs). There wasn't nobody else to run it. None of them had the experience. Like I said, I grew up with recreation, I grew up with it, so I had the experience. I didn't have a degree. In fact when I took the test for certification, I never looked at the book. Because, there wasn't nothing in the book that really tell you about what recreation is. So I could pass the course, and the rest of them didn't. They had the book, but they couldn't pass it.

C: And how did you pick up that knowledge at first?

R: When you're doing everything, (laughs) from maintenance to everything, you learn how everything has to be done, and how it's done, and you learn the ins and outs of it. And so, over the years, you learn all that, and in the end it's a part of you, as far as knowing how to do certain things. You pick it up.

C: So people were still trying to get you fired after you had been there for like a decade?

R: Oh, longer than that (Laughs). I don't think, a lot of them never did accept me. Some did later on, a lot of them did later on. But now, I talk to them, and they don't know I know what they did during this, and I don't... it's no big deal.

C: And you've said that you had to keep going because there was no one else to do it, but what motivated you to work hard?

R: Well, I was always taught if you committed to do something, you do it. But then you expect people to do the same thing for you, which doesn't happen all the time. But when I told the City Manager, like I said at first I was going to go back to school, but when I decided I was really going to do it, I met with him everyday just about in the early years. And we talked about what could be done. And so, when I made the commitment and you give your word you going to do it, you do the best as you can to make it through it, to make it work.

C: Where there ever times along the way, small successes that sustained you?

R: Well, everyday was sort of a small success. Every day that you made it through another day and added two or three bodies or whatever, it was a success.

C: And for the first few years that it was open, did you ever worry that it would close?

R: No, it never was threatened to be closed.

C: It was always sustainable?

R: Well the city manager understood, because he knew how things were going to be. So he never really pushed like, 'you have to do this,' 'deadline this,' never.

C: And was that the man from Miami?

R: Yeah.

C: Do you remember his name?

R: Thompson. I can't think of his first name now, but Thompson. I think out where Mote Marine Lab is, that little island, that's named for him. Thompson, whatever.

C: So you feel like he was an ally to recreation in Sarasota?

R: Oh yeah, he was.

C: And you said you moved to Bradenton. When did you move to Bradenton?

R: Oh, it's been about 20 some years now.

C: So when you come back to Sarasota, you said you get lost, but are there some positive and/or negative changes you've seen?

R: Sarasota has not just doubled or tripled, I think maybe it's quadrupled (Laughs). Where the Van Wesel is wasn't there, the boat ramps wasn't there, and all downtown now, all you see is high rises. We had none of that. And it just has grown to a metropolitan area, where it was just a country, little sleepy town. But it has really grown. Now, I was always connected to Sarasota, but I moved to Bradenton because there was not housing down here. There just was not good housing for Blacks down there. And the area up there was really a bad area, but we cleaned that up, as far as drugs, we cleaned that up, and now it's one of the best areas to settle in. But the housing was much better and much lower prices. That's why I moved to Bradenton.

C: So you're saying that after maybe segregation officially ended there was still some segregation in Sarasota?

R: There's always going to be segregation somewhere. It's just human beings have a tendency to want to look down on someone else. No one wants to be on the bottom rung of the ladder. Everyone wants to be so they can look down on someone else, so there will be a continuation of that. I think of that saying, "The ruling class never gives up anything without a struggle." They don't just volunteer to give you, they not going to do it. They are going to hold onto it for as long as they possibly can.

C: Did anything change at the recreation center after desegregation happened?

R: Well we existed. We had... Arlington Park was segregated for a long time, then it was desegregated. And we had a lot of whites come here, so it did change. We got both races in both places. Arlington was slower I think, here was slow too, we got a few come in. At first, we had trouble getting help because you couldn't find a qualified person to be a pool operator. You were not going to find a white to work under a Black supervisor, that just wasn't going to happen. And so that changed. We had white lifeguards and all after that, so there was a lot of change.

C: And what was Arlington?

R: It was another recreation center. It was built later. First we had Community House down on the bay, then we had this place, then later on they built Arlington Park. That's out on the street that runs right into the hospital down there, down close to Osprey. So that was one that they had a swimming pool down there, too, and they had a bigger program. I think the County still controls that. They built everything else, but they still control Arlington.

C: And did you work with those managers at all, of the other recreation centers?

R: We always worked together. We went to conferences together as one group.

C: And did anything surprise you in this work? You sort of jumped into the Center while you were still young?

R: Well, I didn't consider myself young (Laughs). I'd been overseas for three years, so I was never intimidated by anything I could or couldn't do. So no, it didn't bother me. It's just you're just frustrated because people take so long to grasp onto what you're trying to do. And so, that's the only frustration. But other than that, no.

C: What did you feel like you were trying to do?

R: Build a recreation program. (Laughs). So even though I didn't know where I was going at times, you go down this alley, then you gotta go back, then try the next one until you succeeded. So a lot of hits and misses the first few years, you try a lot of things. That's why we go to conferences, when they had a state-wide conference. You see, at that time, the Black recreation people could not join the Florida state recreation department. So we had our own recreation association, and we would go to these different cities for conferences. And if you saw something you liked, you figure you could adapt it, you bring it back and put it in your program. And everybody was doing the same thing, other cities, they were finding programs they could use.

C: What kind of programming?

R: Well, we had... I think it was Sarasota, Bartow, Lakeland, Tampa, St. Pete, Clearwater, we had a sort of *Atlantis* there, and we all every 3 months would take all our people and go to one city, and spend a day at that facility. And they would come here, then we would go there. So we got to know each other, and who we could work with and who you couldn't. But everyone could work together pretty much.

C: You mentioned Manatee County at the time was more segregated, or had a harder time desegregating?

R: Manatee, in terms of recreation, I think they're probably still behind. They didn't participate in the association we had. The only center they had, I believe was supported by the Coronas. The city didn't provide any recreation at all. So that was a difference. I knew all the people in that program, but they never worked with us in the association.

C: And what do you think is the significance of recreation?

R: I think recreation teaches the whole self. First, it was... everything was physical, physical education. Basketball, and football, track, and that was everything they had. Even when they had the new degrees, it was health, physical ed and recreation. And recreation always trailed,

even with that degree, they didn't really have that much experience. But when you say recreation, that's the whole person. Emotionally, everything, the physical. So recreation, to me, if you want to watch the sunset, or if you want to sit and read, that's recreation. That's affecting the whole body, the whole person. And you don't just want to be a physical person, you want your brain exercised, everything, your whole body. And that's what recreation does for you. It's a total experience.

C: So with Manatee County, or other places didn't have recreation for Black people, what do you think that symbolized or meant?

R: Well, a lot of cities were slow to catch onto recreation, it didn't break out everywhere. Some cities did embrace it, some didn't. Course, the kids in Manatee were always down here, so they still got recreation, but not from that end. And so Tallevast, and Manatee, they always came down here, to the Center.

C: Do you feel like through the recreation center, people were able to meet people they didn't get a chance to go to school with and build relationships?

R: Oh yeah, you do.

C: Do you feel like it became a community space?

R: Eventually it did. In fact, this became the only game in town, so to speak (Laughs). Because kids had nowhere else to go but here. And so, we almost had a captive audience in a way.

C: And did you feel like you got enough support from bosses. After the man from my Miami left, what was your relationship like with the city?

R: Well he was here until he died. He was the one who's responsible for the way it grew. Because he was from Miami Beach, and I guess he was trying to build another Miami Beach. And he almost did (Laughs). At night you'd think he did succeed. So, he really stayed on. But the one who died was the recreation and parks supervisor. He died.

C: And did anything change after he died?

R: Well yeah, he was the expert. He was the kind of person, he told me, "I'm a parks person. I know nothing about recreation, but I will help you in any kind of way I can," and he did. He would get in the car and drive to St. Pete, or Clearwater, or Tampa, and spend the whole day just looking around and seeing what was there. And when the swimming pool was decided to be built, he asked me "What do you know about chemistry?" I said "Nothing." (Laughs). And he said, "Well, you got to learn because we gonna build a swimming pool, and you gonna have to run it!" (Laughs) So when I found out we were getting a pool, I had to go learn water chemistry. So, it's just, you do what you have to do.

C: And you said when the pool was first built adults didn't really...?

R: No, it was younger people mostly. But then later on, we had adult nights for swimming, and mostly men would come. Women didn't really. A lot of the young men came. I think on adult night they really loved volleyball, everybody loved volleyball. And then we had shuffleboard, we had everything. So they could participate in a lot of things, pick their choice.

C: And are any of those courts still in existence?

R: No, I think they just tore down everything when they built this and started from scratch. They took out the pool. Now they have a pool down at the end back here, but it's not the same, or as big as the one we had. This is a new thing completely, everything is new.

C: So you said this was the main site for recreation for Black people in Sarasota. Were the parks also segregated? Or there just wasn't much to do in the park?

R: Well, yeah, everything was segregated. For a long time everything was segregated. But I guess people... you want something close by where you can walk to. As a matter of fact, you can walk to here. But segregation (laughs), sad to say, it's still, more subtle maybe, but it's still there. I always said, in the South, you knew you were segregated. In the North, it was more subtle. They said they were integrated but really weren't. It wasn't integrated.

C: So as far as race and segregation in Sarasota, how do you feel that it's changed or not changed?

R: Well, it's better, of course. You can go anywhere you want. Whether they want you there or not, you can go. But, nobody has to associate with anybody if they don't want to. You can go wherever you want to go, and if they don't want to associate with you, so what? You're not going for association anyway, you're going for whatever activity anyway. It doesn't matter, as long as nobody is trying to prevent you from anything. And most of the time, when they are trying to prevent you, they do more harm to themselves. Because then people want to go because you said I can't. But if you say "Come on" most of them would be satisfied, that's it. It's just human nature.

C: And were the police at that time the main force in Sarasota that would enforce segregation?

R: Well they were backing it. It was just a law really, so everybody was going with the law. No one was challenging law, it was just that was the law.

C: Except for the sit-ins?

R: Yeah, well that started later on, but you know for years nothing was done. It just happened, and there wasn't nothing you could do about it.

C: And when you were at Morehouse, were there any protests or civil rights actions?

R: At that time in Atlanta, no. Atlanta wasn't... that too was later on. In the 50's... no, they started much later. In fact, Martin Luther King went to Morehouse. I think after he left there

he went to Boston College or somewhere up there. When I was there the first time, he was there, but he left. When I came back he was gone to wherever. But in the 50's it was just beginning to fester.

C: So you were raised you said on 6th St?

R: Yes, it's a funny thing. Then instead of 1st street, it started on 7th street. So we actually lived on 12th street, which is now 6th street. (Laughs). Confusing, I know. But I don't know why they started at 7th instead of 1st. And later on they did change, so 7th became 1st, and it went up that way.

C: So is that Overtown?

R: Yes.

C: Did you know many of your neighbors? What was the community like there?

R: It was a whole community there. The church was there at the time, Bethlehem Church that is now on 18th Street, that was at the time on 7th Street in Sarasota. Then we lived on Central Ave, just off 6th Street and across the street from us, eventually Altamont Shipley built a big building on Central. And I came down Central about a month ago, and I just couldn't recognize the area.

C: And where was your barber located?

R: Oh by that time, see I moved from there to the projects. And I stayed in the projects about... I don't know how long I stayed in the projects, but in time this man started building these houses, and I got a house. And we moved right down the street down on 35th, and that's where my kids were raised.

C: Were you in the Janie's Gardens projects?

R: No, there's one over on Orange Avenue and what, about 21st, somewhere in there. It runs over almost to 301.

C: ANd those are still open?

R: Yeah, still open.

C: Did you move there with your mom?

R: No, my mom was gone. It was just me and my family, my kids.

C: Did you like your house on 35st Street?

R: Yeah. I knew I was making sure I was not going to stay in the projects forever. It was a

place...it was better than where I was, but it still was not where I wanted to be. So the first chance I got, I left.

C: And so 35th Street is in Newtown. Did you like your neighbors, or get along?

R: Oh yeah, we got along well. It was a nice little neighborhood. It's still there, a lot of them are still there.

C: Were there certain restaurants or places you would go often?

R: There were restaurants. We had on 27th, I guess it's Martin Luther King now, there were two grocery stores, there were two drug stores, they had a barbeque stand. It was a little business area really. Restaurants, they had everything right on there. So that was the main street in Newtown, and they had everything you needed. You really didn't have to go anywhere. You could go to Winn Dixie and get better food prices, but you could get what you want really.

C: And how long did you live in that house on 35th street?

R: Until my divorce. So, I was there until then. My ex-wife still lives there, she still has it.

C: And how have you seen the neighborhood change?

R: I don't know if it's changed that much. It hasn't deteriorated, I know that much. It is still a stable community. It is still a nice community to live in.

C: I know you didn't have much time off but did you have any hobbies while you were working?

R: (Laugh) Who had time for hobbies? (Laughs) I think the whole job was a hobby (Laughs).

C: Did you ever go out to the restaurants around here?

R: Very seldom.

C: What kind of food was there?

R: Well we had, I guess regular food, whatever we wanted. We had good food, a lot of meats, whatever we needed. My kids never went hungry. They always had a place they could come. Even now, if they want to come, they come down to 35th Street. And my daughter has her own house, off Tuttle. She's out over there.

C: And what does your daughter do?

R: She started out, she went to Morris Brown in Atlanta, and she stayed in Atlanta after she graduated, she and some friends. She started out as a physical therapist, and she came back to

Sarasota and worked at Sarasota Memorial as a physical therapist. And that job started to filter out. She went back to college and got her Masters in early childhood education, so she just retired last year.

C: So when and how did you hear that this new building was going to be named after you?

R: Oh goodness, there was a group who was opposed to it I think when it first... I remember one fellow who was against it eventually promoted it. A community leader. At one time he said as long as he was there, it was never going to happen, but then I don't know what changed his mind, but he did change and he was an advocate for it. But, I think they had... I've got some pictures in here of when the change was made. Because the change was made when the second building was in existence, and they were just going to do it with the new complex, but it was already named from the second building.

C: Why do you think they didn't want it to be named after you?

R: Well I think they still had this group who still controlled everything, and if you weren't with them certain things just weren't going to happen.

C: Did you disagree with them, like politically or something?

R: You didn't have to. If they didn't like you, they didn't like you (Laughs.) Like I said, I was an outsider. And they didn't like outsiders. Even though I went to Booker and was raised there (Laughs).

C: And who was lobbying for you?

R: I don't know. When I heard it was going to happen, I said, "Well, if it happens it happens, if it doesn't it doesn't." It's a nice thing, but I mean it wasn't going to kill me if it didn't. I mean, I was through, I was retired. I did what I had to do and said that was it.

C: And it seems like a lot of people who work here now still know you?

R: Oh, they all might. Yeah, the one who runs the center was a little boy (Laughs) when I was working. I remember this past Martin Luther King Day, they had a breakfast, and in one of the groups that were receiving an award, this young lady came and we talked, because she used to work with me. And I came to find out she was the keynote speaker. And she had been the old postmaster I think over in Houston or Dallas, one of those, and now she's postmaster in the Jacksonville area. And she grew up as a little girl through here.

C: So, how does it make you feel when people still recognize you, and you had such a big impact on people?

R: Well the thing is most of them recognize me, and I don't recognize them. I say, "You know, I don't know who you are," and they realize that. They say I haven't changed, and maybe I haven't, I don't know. But they have because they were just little ones, so when they

grow up you forget what they look like (Laughs).

C: Well yeah, they look different. So you brought some pictures, could we look at them? I'll leave the tape recorder on if you want to explain them.

R: This is when the historical society made this a historical designation.

R: This is after, when they decided what the complex was going to be named, I think that's what this was. This was the picture when they put the historical sign up.

C: So was it called the "Newtown Community Center" until it was renamed?

R: Yes.

C: Was that the first building's name as well?

R: The first building was the Newtown Recreation Center. All it was named was The Rec. Everybody called it that in Newtown; they'd say "Are you going to the Rec"?

R: This is when I was still at work, this is when they had, the three of us had over a hundred years experience, the three together.

C: The old Castle Restaurant [the picture was in]... that was over on 41 right?

R: Yes.

C: And that doesn't exist anymore?

R: No.

C: I've heard that highway 41 has changed a lot over the years.

R: Well, 41, it has changed. After they build 301, that took a lot of the businesses off of 41 and moved to 301, so I think that hurt 41 in that respect. But it's still a viable place for transportation.

R: Now, this is the last commencement before Booker was closed. And that's my daughter, she was the valedictorian of that class, in '67.

C: And is that the daughter who is still in town?

R: Yeah, that's Shirley.

R: And this one you wouldn't recognize who this is. I was still working at this time (Laughs).

R: This is one of the pictures made when it was first designated, after they changed the name.

R: This is Fred Atkins. At one time he was the mayor.

C: And isn't he running for something now?

R: He's running for county commissioner now. And here he is again.

C: Is he a friend of yours?

R: Yes he is. We were on the same committee together. The Newtown Redevelopment Committee.

C: And when did you join that?

R: Well that supposedly just lasted a year, we were trying to get Newtown on the transportation map. They wanted to put up markers, and they couldn't because the state said we didn't have a designated area of where Newtown was, so they had to define where Newtown was. And so we got through with that, and we're supposed to be in the second phase but we haven't started anything yet.

R: This is my grandson, his wife and two kids.

C: Which of your children is their parent?

R: Louis, in New Mexico, that's his kid.

R: This is a picture made by my church, when we had a church anniversary they had a catalogue of all the people at the church.

C: And what church do you go to?

R: First Bethlehem in Sarasota. Down on Main Street.

C: How long have you been going to this church?

R: Oh, about 12 or 15 years.

R: And this is one of the cotillions my daughter was in, the sororities present these every year.

C: And she went to Morehouse?

R: No, she went to Morris Brown. Morehouse is all men (Laughs). Atlanta had, it was Morehouse on one side of the street, Clark on the other, Spelman down the street, and Morris Brown down the street, then they had Cutler. There was five or six colleges in the area.

R: And this is me, and two of my sons, and that little baby is my grandkid.

R: And this is my Helen Payne crew.

C: Why did you decide to start volunteering there?

R: Well I volunteered at... they had all these books they were given, so I started a library to get it squared away. Then they needed a teacher, and they said they would pay me to be a teacher, so then I started teaching. And here's another one of the same group.

R: And this is the guy who took over eventually, he left just before this building was complete.

C: Is he the person that you said was raised here?

R: No, he was the second one after I retired.

R: And this is at the ribbon cutting of the new building.

C: Who are the other people in this picture?

R: This is the director of .. and these are city officials. This one, she used to be the city commissioner, and at this time I think it was some magazine she was on.

R: And this is at one of those community complex things.

R: And then these certificates, I served on the Manatee Risk Abatement Board.

C: What did you do there?

R: Well that met about noise, and whatever nuisance came up on the community would come to the board.

R: And this is the Southeast Real Estate Association. And this is the Crime Watch, I did that for about five years. And this is another thing from that same organization.

C: So it seems like you have always been so involved in volunteering and being an engaged member in the community.

R: Oh yeah, I try. If you live in a community you've got to try and make it better.

C: Where do you think you get that commitment from?

R: I don't know, maybe from my grandmother.

C: What was your grandmother like?

R: Oh goodness, she was a terrible disciplinarian (Laughs). She didn't play. We had this peach tree in the backyard that she used (Laughs). But anyways, when I was about ten years old, I

became her correspondent. I wrote all her letters, so we would sit out on the porch and she would swing and dictate the letters, and I would write all of them. And then she would sit and talk to me, while all the other kids were out playing, and just talk to me. Even if she punished you, she would sit and talk to you and tell you what you did wrong. She just was a wonderful person.

C: Do you feel like you treated kids the same way she treated you?

R: No, I didn't believe in all the punishment (Laughs). No, we were talking about a month ago I guess, and the kids said when their mom was punishing them and said "Oh I'm going to tell your dad," they said they were happy because they knew I wasn't going to do anything (Laughs). So I guess I was the soft one. But no, I didn't believe in it. You can punish in a lot of different ways. Even though sometimes it's necessary to do that, I don't say totally don't spank. All kids are different. I had four and they were all different. You treat them in different ways. No two people in the world were alike, so you had to learn the way for each one. It used to be, the teacher says this so I believe the teacher, but now people believe the parents and the parents believe the kids. I always stuck with the teacher, and that makes a difference.

C: Did your kids go to Booker as well?

R: Yeah, my daughter was in that group, the last class. But the others, my oldest son and then the next went to Riverview. And the youngest son, he went to Brookside first, then he too went to Riverview. Two of them played in the Riverview band. One of them got a scholarship to TCU for music.

C: Is he still playing music?

R: It's a funny thing, when we went out to where he was living, there were twenty kids who went to TCU for music and none of them were in the field of music. They were working everywhere but music (Laughs). But his wife, she still teaches. And one of my grandsons, he was the top tuba player in the whole state. He didn't like school, though. He had a scholarship to go anywhere he wanted, but he said he wasn't interested. And my oldest son, he didn't like school. I mean, since the second grade he said he didn't like school, and I said, "Well, you're going to finish high school," and he did. Then he went into the Navy and came out and couldn't find a job, so I kept telling him to go take a test and see what he's best for. It said he was best for the health field, but he said he didn't like that, so he got along doing these little jobs but didn't make much money till finally he did go and wound up a LPN. Until he got on disability and couldn't do it anymore.

C: And how was Booker different when you went there, or was it different?

R: It wasn't any different, it was probably about the same.

C: I've heard great things about Booker. Did you feel like it was a good school?

R: Well, Booker was a good school. In Zellwood I was in a one room school. People talk about

a one-room school is good because you learn a lot of things while they're teaching other kids. If you pay attention you'll learn a lot of stuff. So when I came out of Booker, I came to Morehouse, I thought the people coming from Birmingham, Chicago would know so much, but I was ahead of all of them. So I found out Booker... because I was better than a lot of where these students were coming from. So Booker was a good school. We had good teachers.

C: So how did you feel about Riverview?

R: Well, Riverview was a good school. My son Louis (laughs), Louis went to Brookside High, and he was interested in the clarinet period. And the teacher wouldn't let him go to practice when he should have been in class, and he didn't like the teacher so he just didn't stay there. So he had to go to summer school to make up after he got in trouble for that. But he loved that clarinet. And he and that band, I used to have to pick him up at 2 o'clock in the morning after they'd go out on the town, got to get up at 2 o'clock pick him up and come back, but he loved it so.

C: And when you were going to Booker it was still segregated?

R: Oh yeah, very much segregated.

C: And when your daughter went there, was it going through desegregation?

R: That was when...well, they said it was desegregation, but there wasn't desegregating. They just took the Blacks out and put them in White schools. That's not integration. That's just moving the Blacks into White schools. They didn't move any Whites into the Black schools, that would have been integration. So Booker became a Junior High I think at that time, and closed Booker down as a high school. I think my daughter, she went to Booker then college, and my other children went to Riverview. The funny thing, people living across the street from each other, some go to Riverview and some go to Sarasota even though they're across the street. And it's amazing human nature, they transfer from Booker, some to Riverview and some to Sarasota, very good friends, and within six months they are bitter enemies (Laughs).

C: Just because of sports teams?

R: Just because they changed schools. They start hating each other.

C: Do you think the rec center became a middle ground?

R: Well they all went to the rec center. In fact, we hired a lot of Sarasota and Riverview, mostly Riverview because I knew one of the assistant coaches. He came to the program here and introduced me to the coach. And we hired a lot of their players for the summer. I think I got a letter of appreciation from him. I got a two-year pass to free games after.

C: Because you kept them fit over the summer?

R: We kept them with a job. There wasn't a job for them otherwise. We hired them as

counselors, part time counselors.

C: So what was it like for your sons? They were in some of the first classes that were bused to Riverview, is that right?

R: Yeah.

C: So what was that like for them?

R: Well, I guess you get used to it. If it's necessary, you do it, because how do you go to school otherwise? It's not about whether you want to or not. You can't walk there so you... When I went to school and I was living over town and the school was in Newtown, we walked, everybody walked. Whites and Blacks walked; there wasn't any bus system period. So it was equal that way, everyone walked to schools. But once the bus system started, then they were busing the kids to school.

C: Did they ever say they experienced racism at their new schools?

R: I don't know, they were pretty much accepted I think. I don't know about Sarasota High but I know at Riverview, I was at Riverview a lot. Especially if you were in the band, or something special, football, basketball. My oldest son and my baby son, they were both in the band. But the other two, Evan, he was just a good student. He went to South Florida and graduated with a degree in Engineering. He didn't come home after he graduated. TVA picked him up after he graduated to come work. He said after he got there it was all these people ahead of him, and he wasn't ever going to get a promotion, so he went to the Air Force and ended up becoming a Lieutenant Colonel, then a 20 year retirement.

C: So were all your sons in the military?

R: No, just two.

C: Did you encourage them in that, or did you mind?

R: No, I never encouraged them. They made the decision. Well, the older one went because he didn't want to go to school (laughs). He'd rather join the military than go to college (laughs).

C: You mentioned that it was kind of a double standard to bring Black students into White schools and not White students into Black schools.

R: Yeah, they didn't close any... They closed Booker, which was the main Black school, and bused all those kids out to other schools. And Booker was a really good school at that time, really. It was still a good school when they closed it down.

C: Did you oppose it when they closed it down?

R: Well it wasn't a matter of whether I opposed it. I didn't like it, but they made the decision,

what could I do about it?

C: So it was made from-

R: The top.

C: Who decided to close it?

R: Whoever was on the school board, they decided that.

C: So you don't remember there being many protests against it, or...?

R: Well yeah, they protested against it, but the kid's have got to go to school, so...

C: Yeah. Weren't there Free Schools that were happening at the time for students who were protesting?

R: Yes, I think at one time they did have some school, but what kind of quality education are you going to get when you're not in the system?

C: But you felt that Riverview was at least about the same as Booker?

R: Well, you still had some segregation. People would talk about some racism in there, but overall it was a pretty good atmosphere for Blacks I think. I don't know was much about Sarasota High. I know they had some football stars who must have gotten along well. I know Riverview, of course I associate it with my kids being there, I know more about Riverview than I do about Sarasota High.

C: And so you were still working at the rec center while your kids were going through high school?

R: Yeah.

C: Do you feel like the closing down Booker impact the recreation center in any way?

R: No because it still was the social hub right here still.

C: And you said that Booker used to have some high school dances here?

R Yes.

C: So did they start having middle school dances here?

R: No. That stopped when the high school moved. But by that time we were pretty much established in the community, we didn't need to depend on it so much anyway by that time.

C: Did you have your own dances still?

R: Yes, we always had them.

C: About how often?

R: I think about once a week we had a dance. And then about once a month we had a DJ come in.

C: And so people from all the different high schools came to that?

R: Oh yeah, they came.

C: And when the dancers were Booker running it, did more people than just from Booker come or was it mostly Booker kids?

R: Well after football games it was just Booker, but generally the whole neighborhood, didn't matter whether they were in school, they came. This was still a center for the community.

C: And what are some of the fondest memories you have from working at the center?

R: I really don't know, it's hard to say. (Laughs). I try not to think too much on it but I guess sometimes you do think. I just loved, believe it or not, I just love the kids. Although they still say I was mean (Laughs). I still love to see them succeed.

C: What were some of the biggest challenges you had working at the Center?

R: Oh, getting good help. Getting people who were qualified. Every summer we had to get a new crew and train them before school was out so they would be ready to go when school let out. But then sometimes you would get, like the woman who works with the post office, she started in 10th grade so she kept working 10th, 11th, 12th. Several were like that, they came in young and we trained them, so we had a few years. And some of them went off to college and would come back for the summer, so that paid off.

C: Just for lifeguards?

R: For counselors, but especially for lifeguards because you had to have training, and most of them didn't have that training. But they could be trained to be counselors.

C: So were there camps that were run here, or just general counselors?

R: We would have a summer programs that ran for three different age groups, and each with their own set of counselors, with their own program, and they went each to places that were different. But we already knew where they were.

C: And what kinds of things did they do?

R: Well, they'd go to Jungle Gardens, they'd go to the skating rink. Especially the skating rink was really popular. They would go to different activities. I think Florida Studio Theatre used to do a lot of work with them. In fact, we had several New College volunteers at that time.

C: And you were the one arranging where everyone was going to go?

R: Yeah.

C: So you probably had to start working on that in the springtime or when?

R: Yeah, probably about a month before, since before school was out we had to decide how many programs we were going to run, setup what places they were going to go, and where and what time. And that's three different schedules you'd have to run. And we'd hire a staff for that, they would take over that and I'd start working on the fall.

C: It seems like you had to have a lot of connections in Sarasota to make all that happen.

R: Well yeah, you had to know what activities they could go to and what was going on. Of course, the skating rink was open year round, so that wasn't a problem at all because we could always schedule them to go there. But we had to schedule all the activities, figure out where they could go for the summer, and plug them into that program.

C: So, do you feel like it was easier to make connections when Sarasota was a little bit smaller, or was it always tricky, or easier now?

R: Well, we had never had, in the summer time, because by the time the second building was open and we were fully staffed, we would pick up a lot of information throughout the year, we were always plugged in to find places we could go. Because even during the school year, some groups would go some places. But during this time, three different age groups would go three different places and have their own staff.

C: So were you still involved in programming after you retired?

R: No.

C: Did you keep up with what they were doing?

R: After I retired, I was gone. (Laughs). I was out of there. But I mean, I wasn't involved so much in the planning of the new building, I came to a lot of the meetings while they were setting up the planning for it, but people were already there, so I didn't come back for the meetings. People who hadn't been involved in recreation period, or the center, and they had this loud voice about how things should or shouldn't be, and they had never participated in it at all. So I just didn't come back to the meetings.

C: How did you feel about that?

R: I felt that, if you didn't help when we were struggling, why do you have such a voice now? Where were you when we really needed you?

C: So it was even older residents there who hadn't been involved?

R: Yeah. Some I had never even seen at the center at all but had a really big voice there.

C: What sort of things were they advocating for?

R: Well, when they talked about taking out the pool for one thing, and these people who had never used the pool before were talking about, they couldn't understand why we couldn't have the pool. Well, we still have a pool, but not... they wanted a big pool, and they never used it anyway. Only the kids used it.

C: And why do you think people got involved in that way?

R: Well, if you can ever understand people, let me know (Laughs).

C: And, I don't know if this is a weird question, but did you ever notice any trends shifting in recreation, or what sort of activities were popular?

R: After I retired, I guess, I really didn't come down too much. Because I think, one of the counselors told the new supervisor, "Well Mr. Taylor did it this way" and that didn't go over so hot. He said "Mr. Taylor isn't here anymore." So I said, well I don't wanna get involved in it because people would come to me when they felt they were being mistreated, and I couldn't help them. I couldn't get involved when you've got a different supervisor running the place, that's not my place. So I never took sides on any of it.

C: And obviously it's still used so much today, but you hear a lot about kids over using technology and not participating in physical recreation enough. How do you feel about that?

R: Well, I think everybody is into technology but me (Laughs). My barber always teased me because it took me forever. Finally my kids bought me a computer. I just really am not a technology person. I can navigate it somewhat, but it's not my area. But it comes in handy sometimes. I think they depend too much on it, kids do. I really don't think kids should be given calculators until they learn how to do basic math. Because what happens when you don't have the calculator? They can't add two plus two. So they need to learn the basic math, then they can use it. And they text so much they lost the art of conversation. They can't talk to one another.

C: And do you feel like there is something significantly different from playing four square from playing video games?

R: I don't know what they do now when they come in. We had pool tables, ping-pong tables, and they played on that mostly. At least one of them was occupied at all times. I don't know

what they do now, they have everything they need here. I don't know how much they're using it, but they have everything. I just wish we had this kind of stuff back when we came along. But I don't know if they're into anything outside of technology, technical stuff.

C: You said there was a lot of change happening in Sarasota in the early days of the center. Especially for Black Sarasota's with desegregation, what do you think the center represented?

R: Well, like I said, I didn't get too involved in the protests because you can't program 24 hours a day and then try to do something added too. And a lot of them criticized me for that too, saying that I didn't take part. But, you do one thing well, or you leave it well enough alone. So if that would detract from my job here, which is my main job, and you got people who aren't doing anything but protest, let them protest. And I can still support them without actually going out there. Yeah, you can support people, but sometimes you can't do anything in the position you're in. That's what happened to the fellow who took over after I retired, and I talked to him, he was president of the NAACP. And I said, "You're working for the city, and these people are against them and protesting. You can't have that position. You can support them, but you can't be the head guy, speaking for them, because you're doing a lot of things against, biting the hand that's feeding you." But he did anyways, and I think they were conspiring to have him gone, they weren't going to put up with it.

C: So you think that the city may have, that something happened to his job because of it?

R: Well, I don't think it helped him any, let me put it that way. I can't say what happened, but I know that the minute he got into trouble, he did something and he was gone. Whereas ordinarily they probably would have just overlooked it, so. Certain positions you're in, you can't do certain things. That's what it is.

C: Did it hurt you at all, did it make you upset that people were sometimes accusing you of that?

R: No, I never... I knew what I had to do, and they did what they had to do. You do what you do, and I do what's best for me and my program, and you do whatever's best for whatever you're doing. There's room enough for everyone to do whatever they want to be doing and still get things done.

C: So, while all the protests were still going on, though, did you feel like this was a space of community building, or a safe space for kids growing up?

R: Well, it was always a place they knew they were welcome to come, the community. Unless they were so bad... There was one guy who had to be banned from the grounds, period. He was just a terrible person. But most of the time they would fall in line when you talked to them. You got kids who had never been disciplined at home, and you had to let them know they couldn't do that here. And you had to be disciplined. You go home and do what you want to do, but when you're here you follow the rules or you can't be here.

C: And did you learn about kid's home life or did you try to keep distance?

R: No, I knew most of the time what was going on in the family, mostly I knew.

C: Did you ever give advice to kids or...?

R: Not against the parents, I never went against parents. I just was in control of what happened here. Once you got home, you do what you want to do as far as you and your parents, but here you follow the rules.

C: And how much consistency do you think the center has had over the years, because obviously the building has changed so much, but does it still serve the same purpose, throughout time?

R: I think it's about the same. Especially this place, I know that.

C: So what is some of the main things kids using the center can get out of it?

R: Well, if you follow the rules, one thing, eventually you will become a more disciplined person. Even though you might be going something at home, just being in here most of the time, especially the summer when they're spending most of their time here, is a big help. It becomes a part of you, and that is with you your whole life as well. So, it's always a good thing to get programs where there is discipline and kids have to fit into that discipline.

C: This may seem like a silly question, but what do you think is the value, or what do you get out of discipline?

R: There's so many things you can get into, even though you know they're wrong, and you have to discipline yourself. The things you want to do, if they're wrong, don't do them. Discipline keeps you in line with society because they don't want you rebelling against everything. You have to be a disciplined person to live in this society. Society has rules and you have to abide by the rules. You don't have to like them all the time, but you've got to abide by them. If you aren't disciplined, you won't get far.

C: Do you feel like there's anything from growing up in Sarasota that you miss, or?

R: No. (Laughs).

C: Do you feel like Sarasota's become a better place?

R: I don't know how to answer that. I'm not involved to the point I used to be, where I had my hands in everything and knew what was all going on. So I can only go by what I see in the newspapers, and that tells me things are not like they're supposed to be. Because we didn't have all the drug crimes for one thing. And that makes a big difference in the whole community, if you have drug problems and kids growing up with it, and that's a big change. And I'm glad I never had to be bothered by that. And what gets me even worse is when kids grow up and see all the degradation that drugs can do for you, and you still get involved. That bothers me.

That's an undisciplined person.

C: So when you were working at the Center, you never really saw people getting into drugs?

R: At that time, no. I think the first time I really saw people getting involved in drugs was when I moved to Bradenton more or less. Because when I first moved there, right where I am now, on 1st Street, 2nd Street was the drug hub for that area. And the government had the "weed and seed" program to bring out bad people and bring in new, mostly new people. And that's when I got involved in the Crimewatch. And we had a special Sheriff group that patrolled that area, and did a lot of night marches. When you march in the night, then people can't sell their drugs and they move on. So gradually we moved them off 1st Street and kept moving them further and further along. So now, mostly, some is still in the area but most of it is towards 13th and further back, so it's a real nice place now.

C: Why did you decide to get involved?

R: Well, you're in a community, and you want to see the community do better, and you want to make it safe, because when I first got there it was dangerous to go out at night. Now you see people 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning walking around, it doesn't bother them. I know it's still a problem there, but nowhere near as bad as it was before.

C: So when was that?

R: The 80's, 90's, all through there.

C: What kind of drugs were there?

R: I remember when I first joined the Southeast Realtors association, which was there before I moved there, and I wasn't involved but I had these two friends who went to my same church and they told me about it. So I started going to meetings and patrolling at night, working with the Sheriff's Department, and it took so long for it to take root, but when it did, it moved things along and now it's a real nice place to live in.

C: You mentioned that you were involved in trying to codify where the Newtown community was. When did that project happen?

R: That just ended last year, it was supposed to just be one year but when made the report to the city. But the city actually approved a second phase, which would be setting up different historical markers around the community and what not. I don't know whether they started that, but it's been ok'ed by the commission. I think the people who had to do the details are still taking a lot of time with it.

C: How did you decide to get involved with the project?

R: Well, they asked me would I do it, and I said yes. Pretty hard to say no when it's something like that.

C: Who was involved in that?

R: It was a committee of seven I think. Atkins was one of them, Fred Atkins, and Jetson Grimes who's a barber and city activist. Some of them I never saw at the meetings but there were seven on the committee. This one woman, she did most of the paper work and she had just come back and organized the group, and the city ok'd it.

C: What did the group accomplish?

R: Well, we got the, Newtown is now on the transportation map for Florida. And they are now in the process of trying to set up the markers for some historical things.

C: So you've been involved in quite a few community projects in Newtown, and worked at the community center. I feel like the word 'community' gets used do often now. What does the word community mean to you?

R: Well, the building wasn't 'community' to start with. That was added to later on. Which, by that time it was a community, but at first it was a fractured community, let's put it that way. But it took some time for it to come together and be a community with everyone involved in it. How I feel now, you've got everybody... I see people at the church, and they tell me how they come here and exercise, or just joined it, and they're just proud of it. Talk about how it's a nice place to be. Not only for Newtown, I mean the whole Sarasota community.

C: And how does one judge the strength of the community?

R: Hmm, the strength of the whole community. I think it depend on the areas of activities available for everybody, where anybody can be included. If you got a community where only maybe half the community is benefiting, that's not a good community. You want something where everybody can take a part in. Not everybody having the same thing, but something for everybody.

C: Is that what you tried to accomplish in your work with the Rec Center?

R: Yeah. We wanted to involve everybody.

C: I think that's all the questions I have, if there's anything else you want to add?

R: No, I said... I've had so many interviews, when you called, I thought, well what else could they want to know? Because most of my whole life is on that board out there, but different people want to know different things. I don't mind, I have time.