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## Dr Steve Ellis

John Anthony Dr.

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Dr. Steve Ellis

July 26, 2000

**Dr. Anthony: That's one of the problems we're having here, our memories are gone. I've got Ernie Herrony coming in next week, remember Ernie?**

Well, actually, I go back to the college before the college then was part of Grayson. I was teaching part time at Plano Senior High School and Ernie was the coordinator at that time.

**Dr. Anthony: So you were actually working for Grayson in addition , like a part-time job?**

Teaching a night class, and I did that for a couple of years, actually and I knew Ernie. I think all of the classes I actually taught were at Plano Senior High school. I'm sure they had classes elsewhere. I had applied for the first teaching job through Ernie and started then.

**Dr. Anthony: You actually taught, those were Grayson County classes.**

White it was still Grayson County.

**Dr. Anthony: How did you get involved with a committee of 100 – did you take much of a role? How were you first apprised of the community college?**

Of course I was living in Plano and had been since 1972, so just kind of keeping up with the local, reading the newspapers. I knew that there were some discussions about creating a community college. Of course, I was very interested in what was going to happen. I went to a couple of the early meetings when Ed Simonson came down, Jerry Hoagland, of course, was real involved at the time and don't remember exactly know, I think they

asked for people to recommend themselves or to recommend others for the committee that were interested and I did. So I was put on that group and I was put on, or chose myself – they organized into various committees and I got on the committee that was looking at technical programs, technical education and so forth. I remember one of the people on that committee was Bill Peterson, the fire chief in Plano, and he was in that group and so we wrote some white papers about types of programs that we thought would be important for the college to consider when it got started as far as technical education, such as fire science and programs like that, computer technology, etc. And I don't know whatever happened to those but I think eventually we did start the kind of programs we actually identified. So yes, I was in that group, I was on that subcommittee for several months I guess.

**Dr. Anthony: Did you take an active roll in the election or the petition?**

Yes, I was involved in trying to get signatures on the petition. I remember going to, living in a country place at the time, and I remember getting signatures from all my neighbors and so forth, doing some of that. I heard the stories about getting signatures during the presidential election – to tell you the truth, I can't remember if I actually did that or not. But I know that was done.

**Dr. Anthony: Yes, Sue said that was done at football games and all.**

Right, yes, I was part of that, we were all part of that trying to get as many signatures on the petition we could and as I recall, we got a lot more than the minimum that we needed.

**Dr. Anthony: Anything stand out during that early period that would be significant to include in the book, before we actually started?**

You mean before you came on?

**Dr. Anthony: There wasn't anything significant after I came on either.**

That was the real start of the college. Of course we were, you know, we were real excited when the bond issue passed and when they passed for the election and so forth. That was the key time because we didn't know, I knew I didn't know much about it, but I knew that there had been attempts in the past to start a community college and it failed, so I don't think any of us really thought it was a done deal, a sure deal, so we really got excited about it. I remember a lot of the discussion early on was, do we want to create our own college, or do we want to approach Dallas County as being a part of Dallas County and you've probably heard a lot or more of that than I know about. But I know that was part of the early discussions.

**Dr. Anthony: Even approaching UTD to see about undergraduate...**

Yes, that was one of the things put to the committee. In fact I think one of the subcommittees dealt with that issue. Do we want to create our own, do we want to go with somebody else, how do we want to organize this? Of course eventually they said let's try to create our own, let's go after the bond issue, go after the vote and so when that passed we were all real excited about that. I remember, I guess, Ed Simonson and he brought Bill Priest in with him as well, who was a big supporter of the new college, which of course, I knew Bill Priest from the Dallas days. I was a little surprised that Dallas would even support it. I would think that they would think that it was in competition. I think a lot of people in Dallas did, but leadership there seemed to be in favor of it.

**Dr. Anthony: Of course you brought in Walter Pike I guess too.**

Right, I was going to say, when they brought in Walter Pike to put the financials together for the election, I believe, the bond issue, that sort of thing, and of course, Walter as I recall, was brought in basically as a consultant first before being made vice president. I guess you name him vice president.

**Dr. Anthony: Do you recall any opposition to the creation of the college other than those for the lower tax rate?**

I really don't. I'm sure there probably was some, but I don't remember any organized opposition and most of the people that I talked to – to try to talk up the college, or get signatures were very favorable toward it. They thought it was a good thing for the county to be involved in. Unlike when we went out for the bond issue later, in which we did have some organized opposition. I did hear some people say we don't want our taxes to go up, I don't know why you need more campuses, more buildings, that sort of thing, but I didn't hear much of that. In your research have you found or run across anything about the old University of Plano?

**Dr. Anthony: University of Plano. There were some, Sue Olivier, I haven't transcribed that yet, but Sue Olivier talked about that. There were several people from the University of Plano who participated actively in creating a college district. She gave me those names, I have them, but not other than that.**

Well, I remember when it was there. It was down on Custer Road and I didn't know much about it. It was, I guess, was a kind of religious school.

**Dr. Anthony: It had some kind of religious affiliation.**

And the president became later on the president of UTD, had moved over there, if I'm not mistaken. So that was, you know, it was there we knew about it, but I didn't know much about it other than it was a private, religious oriented university.

**Dr. Anthony: Yes, that's the only thing that came up about that. As you reflect back after the college got started you were an applicant for the VP job and then came on as a dean. Anything significant during those early years? Steve, basically, the way I'm dividing this up is pre-creation of the district, first five formative years, second-five, third-five and I'll probably be breaking down by chapters of these**

**years. We have, obviously, I have a lot of material but anything you can reflect back on in the early years of the college, in the development that was significant that we ought to put in there...**

How significant!! Well, the real challenge of course was in the instructional area, building a curriculum and building a program because we were still under the Grayson curriculum, under their catalogue at the first, and sort of breaking away from that and creating our own and taking what we thought was really good from them and then creating what we thought we wanted to do. Just the fact of bringing the small group of faculty and staff we had together to do that in the first year or so was really, I guess, quite remarkable because we were having to do everything as you know. There were very few of us and so everybody was involved in everything. I was involved with writing the first policies and procedures manual for instance as to how we were going to operate as well as putting together the first catalogue of our programs. We were involved in going to Austin to meet with the coordinating board staff, for the technical program approval and review. And none of us had any experience really in that. My experience had been more on the academic side. I hadn't dealt with technical programs very much. Herb Peoples, our first vice president had some background in technical education but not in Texas. We really didn't have a lot of expertise so, we went down as a group, talked to Bellie Thoroughgood, as a matter of fact, was the contact at the coordinating board that we talked to. She helped us a great deal. She walked us through the steps it takes to get a program approved and especially in the Allied Health fields, Nursing fields, things like that and was extremely helpful to us so just the fact of, especially, putting the technical part of it, because very few of us had that expertise. As far as the academic that was a little easier. It was really quite remarkable that first year or two that we were able to hire faculty and put a curriculum together and put our policies and procedures, operating policies together with a small group of people, but you know, pretty well stood the test of time.

**Dr. Anthony: Most of them are still around...**

Yes, most of them are, modified some of them to an extent and at the same time you'll remember, we were offering classes all over the county. We offered them at pretty much all the high schools as I recall, McKinney, Allen, Plano, smaller ones up in the north, Farmersville. I think we offered classes just about everywhere and then in some libraries and things like that. So you know, trying to get faculty, trying to get the books out to them. I remember Tony Jenkins, Tony Allen at the time, as the registrar, she operated out of her car selling books to the students at those outlying sites and so forth and just trying to organize it and keep up with it and all that was a challenge. It was interesting. Buying the equipment...I remember when I first came on before we had any faculty at all, we wanted a music program, knew nothing about a music program, figured, I know we're going to have to have a piano. So I went out and bought the first piano. Bought the first piano, which was a Yamaha Piano and we had it up at Central Park Texas. Dr. Anthony, we still have that piano. I was asking Mike Crawford about it the other day. He said we still have that piano as one of the practice pianos at the Spring Creek Campus.

**Dr. Anthony: Times have changed. One we got the music people on board they had to have the Steinway.**

Those were kind of fun times. Also, if you recall, the first year, first semester or two, I was the first dean and the only dean. Then Lilly Palmer came on during that semester and we split the duties and she took, of course, the computers and business areas and I kept most of the liberal arts, and I still had the sciences and so forth. And then we gradually developed and spun off the sciences to Sheryl the next year I guess and began to build the administrative team, but you know we didn't have much of an instructional administrative team that first year either. It was kind of Herb and me, I guess, when we first started and then the original faculty. Of course you remember those days.

**Dr. Anthony: No, but you're bringing back things though. Steve, what I'd like to do, don't want to impose on you, but what I'd like to do once I get a draft, send it or bring it down to you, have you take a look at it, jog your memory, and say ok, let's add this in there, let's add that.**

Love to do that and that would probably help a lot. I could see what you've written, see what other people have said. That'd be great.

**Dr. Anthony: So that's probably the way, I can't remember back to the first five, but the second five and last five, I can't remember last year but in between there.**

In my mind of course the first big event was organizing the college, getting the college started in this area we're talking about. I'd say the first really big break was opening Spring Creek Campus. That really put us, gosh, we, what, doubled in enrollment in one year or something, but I would say that was the big push to make us the comprehensive community college. Before that we were pretty small, I'm afraid.

**Dr. Anthony: We went from twenty-some hundred to 5000 or 6000 just opening the doors.**

But it was rather remarkable, the good reception that we got when we opened and so forth. And how many students did actually show up! I do remember one other thing. One of the big concerns that students had, and in particular parents had that first year was accreditation. Were we accredited? Would these courses transfer? And of course, as you know, that's a process. You don't get your formal accreditation but you're in a candidacy stage and we tried to explain all that to people but I think even maybe some of the other colleges put the word out that they were not an accredited institution and you'd better not send your kids there. So that was...had to overcome that.

**Dr. Anthony: I remember that in the early years. That was the first question, will my credits transfer?**

Which of course is a good question for them to ask, but to try to convince them that, yeah, everything's ok. But we didn't actually have the accreditation, but we were in the



candidacy stages. But nobody really understood that. So that was fun, first self study was fun.

**Dr. Anthony:** Second was fun. You've got a third one about ready to come up, right?

In...four, I thing a a couple years now.

**Dr. Anthony:** Any original characters stand out in your mind over the years. I'm not going to put Layman Markson up there...

You're not going to put...he was though wasn't he!

**Dr. Anthony:** He sure was.

Oh gosh John, we had a bunch of them, I'll think about that – I'll try to write some down.

**Dr. Anthony:** I'll do a chapter just on characters.

We did have. We have had a few that have come through the doors. Got a few that stayed around. Saw Larry Beck the other day, speaking of character.

**Dr. Anthony:** How's Larry doing?

Larry's doing fine.