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## Judge Ron Harris

John Anthony Dr.

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7/2000

Judge Ron Harris

Dr. Anthony: Ron, as you reflect back, other than getting a speeding ticket on your way to a committee meeting to start the college, were you on the City Council at the time, and what were your perceptions as how this whole thing got started.

I guess in trying to remember that far back, I'm not sure I really understood except that there was a need and that everybody doubted that we could make one successful, but the citizens had historically always supported those kind of endeavors. I was just excited quite frankly, to be able to participate in something that could result in a creation of a college. You don't do those very many times in your lifetime. And I guess it grew on me when you look at the people involved; certainly the County Judge and Commissioner who I didn't really know that well at that time and certainly David McCall, that I did know, Cary Cox I didn't know, Bob Collin, Tino, Jim Nelson, it just rolled on and Dixon who chaired the facilities committees, of course Sue Olivier, she and Roy long time friends of ours and it just seemed the right thing to do for a county... little did we know would be a million people in 2025, but I'm not so sure the college hasn't helped and I think that probably back in those days, in my mind, we were lucky that we did it because I had the illusions that City Services were drawing people to Collin County Parks, but in reality it was education. And I certainly, in retrospect, think the college has helped attract people to Collin County as a good school system it's got to go, somewhere after school and the workforce.

Dr. Anthony: You said you participated in the facilities. What were some of the discussions early on.

Yes, I was just sitting there with my mouth open trying to understand all of it, but it was in the end one of balance. I think the college, you mentioned earlier how the Board got

formed, it was one of balance. and when we were talking about it in the facility in McKinney, then the facility in Plano. At one time, we were talking about some facilities in Wylie and Frisco. It was all done in terms of balance and where could the county best serve students. And that's just what continued to stick in my mind.

Dr. Anthony: So trying to get a county orientation, I know from other discussions, there seemed to be some concern that everything was going to be in Plano and they wanted to balance that out.

Oh, I think that was a concern and I don't remember that, but you have to remember I've always been somewhat immune to commute from east Plano to west Plano, Plano verses McKinney. I don't care, never have cared and even while I was on the council you didn't have to not support Plano to support others like the Preston Ridge Campus. You know, that was one of my big deals. I said we've got one campus in Plano and in my neophyte mind, I guess, was you don't get credit for every two or three campuses, you get credit for having your community college in your community. And no economic development effort ever has a tick sheet that says you have four campuses or three – you have a community college presence and I thought, it turns out, I did, I was right or whether I was just lucky, but putting that Preston Ridge Campus out there would break the bail, but seemed to drop right on 121... it was kind of like robin Williams in good Morning Viet Nam, the dyke runs...cross the dyke. And of course I knew we were very close to the Frisco city Council, we'd met with them as the as the Plano City Council and so it just seemed to be the right place to go. Although, \_\_\_\_\_ Harwood ? wanted to get in there and pitch for it. The rest of the council was like, now we don't want to get in there and offer this, offer that, we think it should go.

Dr. Anthony: I recall sitting one time in a meeting doing advising for students that were at the Spring Creek Campus and they said they wanted to take the Nursing Program, and I said you'll have to go to McKinney. They said, we can't go to McKinney, we'll drive out to El Centro, it's a lot closer. I said, wait a minute... you're talking about downtown Dallas verses 15 minutes down the road. It was amazing that perception you couldn't

cross 121. As you reflect back anything stick out in your mind as positives or negatives during that early process?

Yea, and I think I probably didn't know it as much when I saw it. It was the efforts of Sue Olivier. Because it was the petitions but she helped organize after some election we had, people at all the polls, she had yellow roses and all that kind of stuff. But it was also very well attended, I mean at any given meeting, as I remember, we must have had 50 to 100 people – that's pretty strong for something as blue-sky, far out in the future.

Dr. Anthony: any characters you came across?

No, I'm sure Judge Roberts and Commissioner Hoagland, David or Cary – they tend to be the ones to be ones with the lightening rods and I'm absolutely sure some of the characters particularly in Plano, there were probably some anti's but I just don't really remember a big effort to defeat it. I'm glad there wasn't any organized opposition, cause I don't remember anything especially voter turnouts.

Dr. Anthony: Yes, voter turnout I think in the smaller communities, what was in it for them. I recall Princeton voted against it then as soon as it passed, I was reading some old newspaper articles, they'd offered land to have it built in Princeton, Fire Academy and all of that.

And I think that would be been there had the administration not changed from Princeton cause they had the site. You were in office by then... it was headed down the road.

Dr. Anthony: They wanted a lot of commitments from the college. Any disappointments over the years about the college?

You know of course, I'm sitting here with my president... I know personally. My son went there and I think the biggest deal, and I think you may have helped do this, is probably a regional or national... it truly is a community college. It is not a junior

college. Junior college had connotations of you don't have to work very hard and I know in some of the communities that I have relatives living in that are really pretty good college actually. But it still has that connotation of junior college, they've never changed the name and this campus we've had friends go to non-credit classes. I'd love to go to some non-credit classes if I could stay stable enough to attend the classes. I did take one of my Continuing Ed classes in real-estate. In fact, I think I called Judy and said how do I get a book, they're not open, you know, I said, I've got to have a book and it's not open. But another thing – you make a point in the book is you all had a very big presence in the community. Think back to all your department heads, Steve & Martha Ellis, Toni Allen, just were everywhere. (Dr. Anthony: and that was part of our process). And that's the way it needs to stay. Great exception to the article in the Dallas Morning News 3 weeks ago about CEOs that would not get involved in any civic affairs and some would not let any of their senior management get involved because they said it didn't contribute to the bottom line. See, I've absolutely always disagreed with that cause you let Plano, for instance, turn, you let Frisco turn. That directly impacts not only the property value but the quality of life, the education, the public safety, all those pieces that cause EDS, Dr. Pepper, Frito Lay to be successful.

Dr. Anthony: Robbie Robinson, John Rhotin and a bunch of other people that I worked with for the college – one has been one of our outstanding Foundation Board workers from EDS. I mean they made a contribution... I think EDS benefited as did the community.

But I think that's one thing that always stood out and certainly may be a little different tact. I think you had a little more economic development oriented philosophy – your role as opposed to just being a job trainer where you always were at the forefront on the Board. I think Carey, it's amazing that someone could come in in your footsteps cause just like Wayne Hendricks, I'd have never wanted to be superintendent that succeeded him and same for you. But I think Carey has come in and carved out his own niche. He's a hard worker. When I'm at the airport in Austin is when we seem to see each other the most. He's always saying, I got \$600,000 for this or that. Of course he got the Cisco deal.

And he's still active but it wasn't the role and maybe those roles over time in the area has matured. You know, maybe we don't have to have that leadership from the community college itself, not that we don't need a partner, cause they still sit on the Plano Economic Development Board after we got through that little bump, cause you know what we went through. But I think all that was rolled up in the Community Development but still by and all, that is the academic excellence wants to use a buzz word, but I think the credibility with other colleges and that new program Carey's got started with teacher certification and those are the right things at the right time. *(Dr. Anthony: I think he's the right person).* O absolutely, don't mean anything negative but there's just a little bit of a difference. You having picked someone that would be that successful is a credit to you because it sure would have been easier to get someone that you thought would do the job but still wouldn't necessarily rival you. Well, I think Carey's in there pitching and I'm not going to say whether he's going to rival John Anthony or not but he's certainly not looking in his rear view mirror *(Dr. Anthony: No, he not looking to appease anything, he's out there in the forefront where he needs to be at this time.)* And he's working with the Board and the Board has continued to be really non-political for an elective body *(Dr. Anthony: none of them have any single issues on the Board, some of them get a little nutty at times).* It's interesting you bring it up, that's probably another piece of the success puzzle is that probably by luck, I don't remember back any great wisdom that said these people won't be political or won't have single issue items, but you're right, the Board has never had someone to get on there and say, well, McKinney's not getting this or Farmersville needs this. That wanted to run for other office so they were in there beating you up on taxes. I mean it's a political playbook out there and you know it's never been written, you can almost tell when somebody's on page 3 or page 10 or they've skipped to the index and are looking for excuses or other pieces. College Board with Carey and Same, Sue, Margaret and even Glen Justice had his role, but he still wasn't a grandstander in the meetings itself. I understand there were some challenges and I've seen him do it in abatement meetings.

Dr. Anthony: But Glen, you always know where he stands and he's only going to take that position, as soon as you brought in an agenda I didn't know where Glen would be on



that position. Now ET, he ma be on that position one day and the next day he's on another one.

When you're talking about ET, his heart was in there. He could be all over the Board, he was not in it for himself.

Dr. Anthony: He probably, along with Sue Olivier had more concern about students and where we were with students that anyone else on the board. Ron, as I write this book anything specifically you want to make sure I've included in this?

Well, I think Sue Olivier, but Sue's for people, going to be a local anomaly and that's not going to necessarily help the next community. I think that with the balance and the commitment to local involvement in academic credibility, some of those are after the fact. We validate and help it to grow... you couldn't have steered the campus beyond McKinney if it hadn't had those things. And then to me, that's what the purpose of the book is whether it's true to it's history. I think I could tell the people reading that kind of think and certainly no small measure the political leadership of the county. It so happens thse 2 individuals have never really used the community college in campaigns. I mean it was the right thing to do. *(Dr. Anthony – you had 2 outstanding supporters had 2 county judges both of them have been very strong supporters)*. Again it has been the community and that broad-based approach with the college. I think it may be another asterisk , but you're administration and your staff really allowed that commissioner from A Precinct and those county judges to be supportive because they weren't busy trying to guide you or justify why you weren't a county community college and even short of maybe City Manager. No one has disputed any program that the County Court has come up with because we are county-wide. There is no, even thought certainly when I lived in Plano, there was an easy four-one road. We decided to get rolling but because I, like you, realize certainly after the election, that all parts of the county are important when it come to an election because the population centers could pass an election if everybody voted, but because everybody doesn't vote, they can't pass, but could kill. So those dynamics have

to work together. But I think that county-wide balance, academic credibility and community involvement are part of these strong points.