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Ralph Hall Interview - - History of CCCCCD

With Dr. Anthony - - May 31, 2001

**Dr. Anthony: Ralph as you reflect back you came on board in what – 85 – 86?
Walter brought you on as one of the first employees.**

Yeah, I started full-time in October but Walter called me I think it was late May or early June and his office was in the Nations Bank and he called me up and told me there was a new community college starting in Collin County and I was the Vice President of Mountain View and he asked me if I'd like to do some bookkeeping so I told him sure so I met with him at his house and I'm sure that was in early June – late at night. But anyway he explained the operation – the college didn't have any money - - very few transactions to do but I did the bookkeeping on a PC that I had at home until I started full-time in October of 85. Then it just took off – we sold the first 35 million bonds - - - then we bought the building - -

Dr. Anthony: Were you active in the 1st sale of the bonds? I know that you - - -

I don't recall that I was that active in the sale of the 1st bonds. Dr. Pike worked with the financial advisors. I remember talking with Chick - - - I couldn't get it all on the 29 million 500 thousand or something on the numeric - - it's hard to get 29 million on that little bitty line. I certainly remember that and of course I was active in the next 35 million. I remember I started when you were on 15th street. Then we moved to the Cox building on 380, then we moved into the building on 380 that we bought - - - great times!!

Dr. Anthony: As you reflect back on the first couple of years - - anything that stands out that were different or a surprise to you?

Well I think that one thing that I can recall is - - - sometimes when I think back - - seems everything is just a blur – everything going so fast and how far we’ve moved in the last 15 years. So many new things happened – you know I told you that you were either very very smart or lucky because you made some real good decisions on some things like the Preston Ridge Campus. That was a very good move. I can recall you know Dr. Pike would like to get involved, hands on, if you would – he’d like to get his screw driver out and pliers and work on something. Putting furniture together or whatever.

Dr. Anthony: There are some pictures of him somewhere doing that.

Right. So many times you’d talk about how much money you’d pay for him to _____ he really liked to get involved. He was a very _____ man but a really good man. I really enjoyed working with him. In fact I learned a lot from Dr. Pike. He was a very intelligent man.

Dr. Anthony: When Walter died then you took over as Vice President of Business Affairs and what challenges did you face during that time? Back in the early 90’s?

Well, if you recall it was a very special time for me because we were just going into an audit and Wayne Robertson who was _____ at that time and walked off the job. He was my key accountant and we were going into an audit and we weren’t ready for the audit. I got a bad report on the audit. A substantial weakness on the audit report and I put together a plan - - adding some additional staff that we needed to get us straightened out. I met with you and you were very agreeable to work with me and allowed me to add 4 or 5 additional staff people. You let me add the staff people and we got on an even keel and things started smoothing down in the business office. But my head was below the water at that time and if you hadn’t allowed me to add those additional staff people, I would have had to quit because I couldn’t do the job. I really couldn’t and you know it worked out great. Then we got an exceptional business operation after that. That was a stressful time. In fact I saw Wayne R. not long ago. I was sitting in the car at the Dallas Credit Union and he was in a Jason’s Deli uniform.

Dr. Anthony: Oh my God. Didn't he work for Amway for a while?

That's right – I think so and such a waste because being an accountant and I think he's got 3 parts of the CPA completed. He's probably got it completed by now but here's a man whose _____ and I have not seen him since then in early 90's. He said hi to me and we talked – but then just walked off like he did before.

Dr. Anthony: I recall – and wasn't there another fellow we brought up for a couple of weeks from south Texas?

Yes from South Texas Community College and he went away too.

Dr. Anthony: His wife couldn't adjust or something?

That's right. That's when I hired Julie.

Dr. Anthony: A Godsend.

Yeah she was great. I talked with her not long ago and she's still in this area – having children and wanted to work part-time from home and you know there's not much that I had for her to do – kind of difficult you know to work part-time from home in this office. There were lots of challenges back then. I could tell you one thing that was great and that's when I needed support you always provided that and I really appreciate that. I really did. It was great.

Dr. Anthony: How about, Ralph on the building side – you were very strong on the financial side and we were continuing to construct building. Do you remember the first building project that you actually got involved with?

I'd say it had to be the PRC _____ 1988 – Spring Creek Campus and

Dr. Anthony: Were you involved in the extension at Central?

Yeah – I guess that was the first. I keep getting things out of order. You can remember the sequence of events so much better than I can. That was before we started on PRC. Yeah I was involved in that. Most of that construction work was you and Walt. Walt reported to you and I mostly reviewed and looked at problems that were related to pay and if they didn't conform (?) to contracts or whatever but as far as working specifically with architects – I didn't have that much involvement with that. You enjoyed that and of course Cary is not doing that now and that's a whole different ball of wax. I enjoy that too but it's a different workload on you when you get involved in that as you know I have some difficulty in involving people and I have to do that now. I like to do things on my own. I'm kind of a controlling person.

Dr. Anthony: As long as you recognize that's _____

And I am – I need to involve people – they need to feel like they're in on the decision making and many times they aren't and they need to feel like they are. Yeah and I guess the fire station and the - - -

Dr. Anthony: Shooting range – How's that coming along? Do you use it now?

Not since it opened up. I haven't had the opportunity – but it looks like it's doing just fine – they're using it. I've been up there a couple of times just to look at it and everything was o.k. Standing outside to see if I could hear anything. It's amazing. It really is.

Dr. Anthony: Guess that's the first real project that you really got involved in.

That's right. The firing range. Have a (qualification to teach) regarding the firing range. I'd like to teach some classes up there. There's quite a few faculty and staff wanting to take that and I think that I would really enjoy it.

Dr. Anthony: Ralph as you look back – what kind of innovations/improvement/models have you developed for the business side of things. I know that during the period of time there's been a lot of creative things taking place out of your office that have been used.

Oh yeah, oh yeah – having on line the budget system – where each cost enter manager can put their budget on line, using a PC in their office, developing their budget based on personnel cost back up – person's name, SS # in a month on each account. That's one section of it – then we have another section that is equipment. List their equipment and it all works together – the personnel – the non-personnel. Put all those together and you can pull reports sorted by month – by SS # - by cost center – by responsible person. This year we added equipment back up, instructional back up. We have a very integrated budgeting system. Everyone seems to enjoy it and it's easy to work with. We can produce any report and in any order that we need to. There's not a lot of colleges or universities that have an automated budgeting system. We gave a copy of our budgeting system to South Texas Community College. They have a SCT (?) software. We have an automated purchasing system that is a piece of software that we bought. It doesn't integrate with our SCT (??). It doesn't need to – but it's a piece of software that was used by the City of Richardson and the City of Austin and we bought it. It's from an Austin Company and we've had that integrated purchasing system for 7 or 8 years and it really works good also.

Dr. Anthony: You also like to get involved in the technology side of things don't you? There have been a lot of changes over the years. Things you've implemented.

Yeah, yeah. The challenge is trying to stay _____?? And pay for it. Phone service - - dial service (???) between campuses. This has saved lots of money. (Dr. Anthony I'm not sure exactly what Ralph was saying – but it's all in regard to phone system). Guess about 96 – 97 Sprint paid us \$350,000 for that frequency and we were able to up-grade that system to a 6 figure (?) system which we are still using and still

works for us for a number of years. We are now working on a 50-mile fiber optic link to tie our campuses together and we should have that up and running by December. We will still use microwave system for a data for a (??) of use because it works good and it would cost - - - we'd have to change out some of the switch gears to get the voice switched over to the fiber optic so we're going to use the system for a number of years. It's paid for itself a number of times over.

Dr. Anthony: One the software side - - did we have SCT from the beginning?

Yeah and that was a really good decision and that decision as you know was roughly Dr. Pikes and we made the decision to go with this and this was pretty good because they've made some good innovations in the last few years and they keep us current. We've been enrolling students over the Internet for at least 4 years. Dallas County on Data Tel and they still can't enroll students on internet so - - yeah that was a really good decision and to replace that software now would cost us several million dollars so really good decision. We were one of the 1st ones in this area to be able for students to enroll over internet, enroll over the telephone, pay over the phone and now we're moving up front where we can take checks over the internet so they'll be able to pay by check or credit card. That was a good decision and also we're working on Continuing Education so by this fall we'll have it where CE students can enroll over the Internet for those classes and that will be up this fall. By July 20th. So that was a good decision to go with SCT and stay with SCT. It's been good for the district.

Dr. Anthony: Ralph this is going to be a history of the college but I do want to put in some humorous things. Can you re-cap over the years and remember some humorous things or characters that we could mention in this book to lighten it up a little bit?

(Walt was mentioned with laughter) (Couldn't make out exactly the first part of it)

Walt is a really nice guy, a little rough around the edges – a little bit rougher than I am. A real nice guy and would do anything in the world for you – in fact - - I've got to think

about this - - he's said some things over the years that have been "historical". He comes off the wall sometimes with some of the things he says but again like I said – a nice guy – hard worker. He has a heart of gold really a really nice guy. You know Dr. Pike was not a very humorous guy but you know he could take a 2 x 2 piece of paper and write a memo on it. Remember that and you'd need a magnifying glass to read it.

Dr. Anthony: Saving money!

I know and he'd keep a pencil sharpener on his desk – he liked #2 pencils and he would use the pencils till they were like 2 inches – writing on those little 1 inch square of paper. He was saving money. He really was and he'd write you a memo on the back of scrap paper. I think a lot of that was obviously the way he was brought up and during the depression – growing up in East Texas – just very conservative.

Dr. Anthony: My favorite store with Walter is _____? Texas flag – having stars up-side down.

He used coupons a lot.

Dr. Anthony: Yeah, he got that from Bill Priest!

Is that where he got that – well he came into my office one day and said I've got these coupons for this Mexican restaurant down on Hwy 5 – why don't we go there for lunch. I said fine – so went down there and he or I either one really didn't understand what the coupons were for. They were for menu Edo. They brought 2 great big bowls of this soup – understand that this is made out of tripe and it's a soup – they brought us chips and sauce and I started eating the stuff – it was bad – it taste like ____ dish soap/water ??.

Dr. Anthony: It was free though.

He looked at me - - and I really thought Dr. Pike would eat anything if it was free but he said - can't eat this - let's go somewhere else and we did but he knew from then on what menuedo was. I'm sure if he had other coupons for this he threw them away. He didn't want anymore of that. I certainly remember that. He had coupons from everywhere. I can't remember a time when we went to lunch that he didn't us a coupon. He would split the coupon discount with you. He did like coupons.

Dr. Anthony: Yes he was quite a character. Anything Ralph that you think I really need to make sure that's in the book?

There are so many things - its really difficult. What I'd like for you to do is let me set down and think about it.

Dr. Anthony: Sure that's fine and you can call me or e-mail me whichever you prefer.

You know just to say this and I honestly mean this - - - these 15 years have moved so quick - you always had so many things/projects to do that things were just flying by.

Dr. Anthony: I know you always use to come in and ask when we were slowing down.

It's moved so fast and it's been fun really it has - and it's still moving so quickly. I don't know when it's going to slow down. I'm hoping that I don't have to work that much longer - - - I'm 53 uh now 52. I just don't want to work that much longer. Fast pace and lots of stress - 6 or 7 more years - have to get my gall bladder out - - - if I don't have anything else going wrong - but it's been fun. It's just amazing - - I think when Dr. Pike called me back in 1985 - it was so exciting to think of having the opportunity to participate in a new community college district.

Dr. Anthony: Best job I've ever had.

Best job I've ever had - - I agree with that totally. I started out in education in 1971. I worked with DISD a couple of years then to Dallas Mountain College and stayed there for 12 years then came here in 1985 and I'm going into my 16th year here and I've thoroughly enjoyed it. It's been great - - it's been fun. I really think you made some really good decisions. I think you should put this quote in the book from me. You know I've told you that the board thought you walked on water.

Dr. Anthony: It was a good board relation – you know they let us do what we wanted to do.

I think if you build something like we built here – the relationship has to be that way and the board staying out of the way.

Dr. Anthony: They did and they made it a point to stay out of the way. When I contacted them they would say – you do that – go ahead and take care of that. I really attributed that to our board - - -

I think you were really fortunate to have a board like that to let you do what you needed to do cause you could move on things and get things done and they certainly supported you which was so beneficial in accomplishing so many things.

Dr. Anthony: In your 15 years you've made a significant contribution too.

I appreciate that – it's been fun during the time that you were here. In reflecting back it's amazing at all that has been accomplished and how quick – and it all just came together and you wonder if it will come together - - and it did - - it did. And we did a lot of financing if you recall.

Dr. Anthony: And re-financing.

That's right – we had 7 million dollars worth of (geo) bonds and 8 or 9 revenue issues and re-financing and getting ready for another re-financing that we did in 1992 – we're going to do another one next month cause the interest rates are dropping. That's what I really enjoyed – all the different variations - - the contractual obligations.

Dr. Anthony: That's where you helped Ralph cause you would look for ways that you could find - - - -

That's what you told me one time - - don't tell me what you can't do – tell me how you can do it. It was a challenge but yeah it was fun – it was fun.

Dr. Anthony: My best recollection of you was when you made your first board presentation. I'd been doing it for years and I turned it over to you and you just did it and the board ate it up.

I appreciate that. I was very nervous – I'm not nervous anymore in talking to the board. The board gets kind of _____ sometimes.

Dr. Anthony: It's a different board.

Glenn Justice and E. T. Boone are still at it. Sometimes they're pretty tough. It kind of concerns me sometimes – they say some things sometimes that I believe if they'd wait a minute they wouldn't say – cause they're not really in that role to be critical like that.

Dr. Anthony: And they do it on the basis of no knowledge.

I need to think about some things.

Dr. Anthony: Do that and I really appreciate your time.