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FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

Name: Jim Bierer

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Tape: 62

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Tape FLHP0140

01:01:13

Q:

Um, yeah it'll just be a conversation between the two of us. Uh, first of all.

A:

This won't show if I have this here will it?

Q:

Well, actually if you're looking down a lot it's going to look a little strange and you might hear the rattle of the paper.

A:

There's no teleprompter here, what am I going to do?

Q:

I can almost guarantee that anything I ask you is going to more of a personal feedback, not so much dates.

A:

Oh, that's great, that's great.

01:01:36

(Cameraman – she'll ask you questions and then if there's something she didn't ask you can check in between when she's asking)

Q:

Yeah, yeah, while I'm asking a question you know feel free to look at your cheat sheet if you want but we're not all that interested in dates, we know the dates.

A:

You saw, I forgot to read the release carefully to see if this was going to be sold to Renaldo or something you know (laughter).

01:02:07

Q:

No. First uh, we, start with if you could just give us your name and spell it just so we have it, we have it correct.

A:

My name is Jim Bierer. Uh, last name spelled B-I-E-R-E-R.

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01:02:18

Q:

Great. And uh, usually we start a little bit of background. Uh, how long have you been in the area uh, those types of things. Your family, a little bit about your family, where you went to school.

A:

Um, moved into this area in 1967 to take a job at the Ross School District as a high school biology teacher. Uh, I was married, let's see I came in '67, was married in '69. My wife is from Hamilton. Uh, we have lived in Hamilton every since that time.

01:02:52

A:

Uh, I've been a teacher in Ross Local School District for 31 years. One year I took off to work for the Department of Agriculture. I had worked for the Department of Agriculture during the summers as a program specialist and I took the one year off to work at the state level. Uh, then I went back to teaching again. And so that was a little bit about myself.

01:03:24

Q:

So Ross Local schools um, tell us a little bit about first of all um, it's so close to Fernald, the school district is. (Comment – right) First of all how, first of all what were the perceptions like when you first got here, what did you think Fernald was?

01:03:47

A:

Uh, when I first began teaching there, obviously being within five miles of the site a lot of our students' parents worked at the site. And there was never much conversation between the students and myself because being, they didn't know very much. Uh, in time they did say my parents work at the defense plant.

01:04:11

A:

Obviously it was some sort of a controlled business because, even though it had the symbol on the tower indicating it might have something to do with dog food. Uh, certainly anyone who drove by would know that you wouldn't have high fences with barbed wire and armed guards for a dog food plant. Uh, so we knew, and also from what those students said that it had something to do with the defense program.

01:04:41

A:

So uh, that's about all I knew for years and years and years. Even the name National Lead uh, certainly you, I couldn't think of anything that lead could be that much of a security that they would need to have it guarded in such a way. Uh, but little by little things started to come out about what actually was going on there at the site.

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01:05:14

A:

And it began to emerge that there was some things to do about, with uranium and uh, there were fears with a lot of the kids that they may be making bombs out there and that the place could blow up. Uh, other than that uh, very little was really said about it. Very little was known until the dust release that did make the newspaper and the community seemed to get somewhat agitated about it, well in some cases very much agitated about it.

01:05:47

Q:

Tell us about that first public meeting, were you there?

A:

I don't believe so. I don't think I was there at the first meeting. No, I was not there, I know I wasn't. I didn't really become involved until 1989, '87 excuse me, 1987. Uh, my principal at the time, Steve Miller, approached me and said there's a very interesting program going on in Columbus, Ohio and you might be interested in taking a look at it.

01:06:19

A:

And he said we'll drive up there and you can see for yourself and see if it's applicable to uh, Ross Middle School, 'cause I was teaching at the Middle School after my stint with the Department of Agriculture. I went back to the school district, instead of high school I went to the middle school. Uh, I was a seventh and eighth grade Science teacher.

01:06:43

A:

We went up to Columbus to one of the school's up there it was a junior high, and they had a partnership with Batelle. And the idea was that Batelle would bring in their engineers and scientists and work with the kids hand, hands-on, small group and they did experiments and activities that these engineers actually did as part of their jobs.

01:07:10

A:

And it was very interesting. The kids were very motivated. And I went away thinking gee, this would be great. All we would need is some industry where they would have engineers, scientists, and we could do this with, with uh, our school district. And Mr. Miller said, "I've been contacted by Westinghouse which is the contractor for Fernald and they've shown some interest."

01:07:38

A:

And so I got in contact with their community relations people and we talked about setting up a similar type program at Ross. And I said since I've seen the program at Batelle I had an idea about it and we can sit down and design a program. And so that's what we did in the summer of '87 we designed a program that would be a partnership between Westinghouse, Fernald and the Ross Local School District, namely the Ross Middle School.

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01:08:15

A:

We came up with ten sessions and at that time Rene Cook who was the community relations specialist. I don't know exactly what her title was; she solicited some volunteers from the site to come to Ross to share their hobbies. The things that they did as part of their jobs, so that the kids could have a taste of what real science is like outside the classroom.

01:08:45

A:

And it was an immediate hit. As I recall some of our first sessions was "Why does popcorn pop?" And the kids had a great time with that. Learning about the popcorn kernel and how the gases expand and explode and make this kernel that we eat. And there were other sessions that there were very high interest and I think the reason that Westinghouse and Fernald really became involved in this was an image thing.

01:09:18

A:

It certainly helped their image. Every time we did the Partnership in Education through the school year there was always an introduction of these engineers, they told about themselves, about their responsibilities and what they were doing at Fernald so that the kids had some education of what was going on out there.

01:09:44

A:

Especially after 1989 when the site was closed down. We instituted kind of a career orientation to our Partnership in Education program so that the kids could ask questions of these engineers. "What kind of schooling do I need to do this kind of work?" And so on and so forth and also the engineers told the kids a little bit about what was going on out there at the site.

01:10:12

A:

And their responsibilities and how interesting it was and answered their questions and relieved some of their fears and that about what was going on at the site. And so it was uh, immeasurably good for Fernald because this was, they weren't going to be able to make much impact on the adults, most of them already had their minds set on as far as their feelings and perceptions.

01:10:44

A:

But the kids were wide open for the most part. And were willing to learn and then pass this on to their parents and siblings as to what was really going on out there at the site. 'Cause basically what people heard was rumor or what they picked up in the media which many times was not very accurate. And the program uh, the Partnership in Education Program has gone on and on since that time, it's still going on today.

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01:11:14

A:

Uh, has been expanded beyond Ross to Harrison uh, to Crosby Elementary and Miamitown Elementary over the years. Whether they're still involved in it right now I'm not sure. But the initial idea has, has uh, has gone on for many years now and has been very, very successful.

01:11:37

Q:

That's great, yeah. Now the outreach is something that not very many people have talked about you know so. You mentioned that most parents had a mindset and it was based on rumors and those types of things, what kinds of things did they believe about Fernald?

01:11:53

A:

Well they believed that things glowed out there. And that went on for years and years. In fact one year, it wasn't too long ago, people thought that Fernald was on fire. And there was this red glow and right near Fernald and it turned out to be Northern Lights. And there would be other times when the kids would say, "boy, it was glowing last night."

01:12:23

A:

And really it was the vapor lamps that were used to illuminate the parking lots and that. A lot of misconceptions. Uh, one time I had an employee from the site come out to talk to my class about radiation, that was our topic. And so they were going to come out and uh, give the kids some background on radiation 'cause I certainly wasn't an expert on it.

01:12:48

A:

And when that person came in the room, it was a man, when he came into the room we had one little boy who was in the front row; he had a black T-shirt on I remember, and as soon as the person walked into the room he grabbed his T-shirt and pulled it over his head because he was afraid that something was going to happen to him because of this person.

01:13:10

A:

And uh, I believe there was even one time when one of the students in a question and answer uh, time, asked if we would turn out the lights so we could watch him glow. And they turned the lights out just to show because you worked out there you didn't glow. And the kids whose parents actually worked out there weren't as skeptical as those students whose parents didn't work out there. And they had a lot of misconceptions.

01:13:38

A:

And you could tell that it came from their parents. And it wasn't so paranoid that kids didn't want to be next to kids whose parents worked out there. It wasn't anything like that. But there was just this underlying fear of what was out there and that it could come from the site to them personally. And so

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we explained to kids when they came in our area around the school and they had balloons that they put up in the air and things that looked like tiny dirigibles and whatever to map the air currents.

01:14:21

A:

Uh, we explained to the kids exactly what they were doing. That it was simply to find out if there was a release at the site, what, where the release might go and that it really didn't have any affect on them. But most of them by that time which was probably in the '90's they pretty much accepted it as okay these are some people out here doing some scientific work and it was fun to look at and watch but it wasn't anything of great danger to them.

01:14:53

Q:

Now you were pretty much teaching all the way through the Cold War, I mean the height of the Cold War (Comment – yeah, yeah) and uh, how did your students react to the Cold War and the threat of Russia and all that?

01:15:05

A:

Uh, I didn't teach Social Studies so we didn't get into the political part of it. Scientifically it was not normally part of our curriculum to teach uh, anything about radioactivity other than being a source of energy. And uh, there were a lot of incidents where students were not too sure about the safety of radioactivity, especially when we had the Three Mile Island.

01:15:36

A:

In fact we had bought a new textbook series and uh, it was right after the Three Mile Island incident and when we got to the chapter on radioactivity the picture at the very beginning of the chapter was a picture of Three Mile Island. Which was you know rather sad in a sense, the credibility just wasn't there anymore. And so uh, we, we heard a lot from textbooks and from periodicals and all that about the availability of alternative sources of energy other than nuclear.

01:16:16

A:

And we watched over time the closing of nuclear plants and of the proliferation of coal-fire plants, oil and gas. And uh, so there was, I think that a lot of the feelings that the students had were somewhat negative; questioning about nuclear energy and radioactivity because of what has come out in the media, what has been in textbooks. I always try to remain as neutral as possible on it so that the kids can make up their own minds.

01:17:01

Q:

And how about the uh, having Fernald so close? I understand when you visited the EOC for the first time you understood that a little better.

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A:

That was scary uh, to, Homer Bruce took me around when I worked out there for one summer and uh, I knew that being a defense plant that it, there was a possibility it would have been a target for the, for the Soviets. Uh, but when I walked into that control room and I saw the phones and the maps and all of that like you would see in a movie where they were a prime target and this was their bunker, communications bunker and all that.

01:17:53

A:

It really gave me a kind of a chill to think that you know I'm almost five miles from ground zero here. This was a very serious situation uh, the Cold War. It really kind of brought it home. You think of mostly the Cold War is something happening elsewhere not right in your backyard. The link was just too real.

01:18:23

Q:

How about your students; were they aware of that situation at all?

A:

Probably not. Uh, I certainly wasn't going to tell them. Although after the fact I may have mentioned it you know in just recent years something about it if the topic ever came up. Again we don't usually study radioactivity other than to mention it as a source of energy. There's too much other sources of energy that, that uh, now is kind of taking the highlights because of the proficiency tests that we have to ready them for. We don't get to go into fascinating topics that we would like them to know about; we just don't have that time.

01:19:09

Q:

So you taught a lot of kids I guess who I would consider that grew up in the shadow of the bomb. How did they feel about the possibility of just obliteration and – I know that there was a lot of media attention about nuclear winter and those types of things, how were your students reacting to that?

01:19:29

A:

For the most part I didn't sense anything, they didn't tell me outright. Uh, they didn't seem to be paranoid at all about, for the most part. Kids you know they don't look at things the same way adults do. Uh, they think pretty much that they would be exempt from any of those kinds of things. So uh, no really didn't sense any real unrest or whatever with the kids on those issues. They were always pretty open. There's always some you know that were, seemed to be scared, but they didn't exhibit it very much if they were.

01:20:16

Q:

Now in the mid '80's when the dust collector releases happened, of course that was really '84 - '86 and there was a lot of different things that happened directly after that including a lot of media attention, national media attention those types of things. Uh, first how did you personally react to that?

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01:20:34

A:

I was very concerned but knowing the weight of uranium dust I knew it didn't fall too far from the stack that it came out of. Um, as far as airborne releases, I worked inside the building uh, I didn't feel a tremendous amount of anxiety about it being in the air since I spent most of my time inside the building. Uh, also I kind of had the sense that the way the wind blew it would blow it into the Fairfield area before it would blow it right where I was working.

01:21:12

A:

So I didn't have, I had very little, not too much anxiety about it. I was kind of angered that it happened and that it happened repeatedly. Something can happen once and it be an accident or a mistake or malfunctioning of some kind but then it should be corrected. And when we heard about release after release there was something wrong. And I could see why groups of citizens would be very upset about it especially if you lived bordering the site.

01:21:50

Q:

And within your classrooms when all that was happening of course, I mean I don't know how much kids were keeping up on the news or whatever uh, but how, first of all how were just the general populous reacting, the general populous as students? Then also how were the kids whose parents worked at Fernald, how were they reacting?

01:22:11

A:

Many times I didn't know that the parents worked at Fernald unless they actually told me that in some, some uh, discussion. Most of the time when I had discussion with parents it would be about student progress, it wasn't about things that they did, the type of job they had or anything like that. So I knew very little about how the parents felt about it.

01:22:37

A:

Uh, the students uh, they didn't seem to be overly concerned. They didn't come to school saying oh there was a release at Fernald, are we going to be okay here. There was nothing like that was said. We had no emergency procedures that I am aware of at the school that in case of a release I would imagine they would call the school and say keep the kids in for recess for those grades that had recess.

01:23:03

A:

Uh, but I never recalled any uh, any discussions about it through the staff, through the students or really through the parents. Most people I think just kept it pretty much to themselves. Uh, I think that uh, the media was their main source of information.

01:23:28

Q:

And uh, when all this was happening did the school district contact Fernald to find out, I mean from the source what was happening?

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A:

They may have but I certainly didn't know of it. It may have been done at the superintendent building the principal level but certainly not at the, at the teacher level.

01:23:51

Q:

Okay. Um, tell us a little bit about um your involvement with the FCAB?

A:

Uh, one summer I believe it was in the summer time I got a telephone call from Eulahn Bingham who was associated with I believe University of Cincinnati. And that she was convening a group of stakeholders to look at some of the issues that was going to uh, be resolved at the site and wanted to know if I would be interested in participating.

01:24:35

A:

And I told her I would be interested in participating. I had a little bit of knowledge of the site. I had worked with some people at the site with the Partnership in Education Program and uh, also I had been asked by the site to represent the area as a community leader for a group called the Community Leaders Network. And uh, which convened in February of '93.

01:25:10

A:

So by the end of '93 when the uh, what was then the Fernald Citizens Advisory Board was formed uh, I started to get an appreciation for not only what went on at the site but what went on across the country. 'Cause there were other sites that were involved in this uh, cleanup effort. And uh, I believe it was very important to have a, some sort of an idea of what the sites issues were.

01:25:44

A:

In resolving ours I understood that whatever you do at Fernald is going to impact other sites as well because some of the material obviously would be leaving this site. Obviously that we would have technologies that would work in more than one place. So uh, I became one of the members, one of the educators you might say on the uh, the advisory board, not the advisory board but the task force.

01:26:11

A:

Uh, we identified four or five areas, which we felt were very important to the citizens in the area, the stakeholders in the area. And we felt it was very important to come up with some recommendations to the Department of Energy on such things as what will be the future use of the site after it was cleaned up. To what level will we clean up the site.

01:26:37

A:

What will be our priorities as far as what should be done first, second, third and so on. Uh, where should the waste on the site go. And so we felt that those issues had to be quickly addressed by the stakeholders to come up with some suggestions to DOE. It was not something we could wait a long

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time on because the cleanup efforts were already underway. And so the Records of Decision were being formulated.

01:27:12

A:

And so we felt it was important for us to as quickly as possible come up with some recommendations and it took us two years. And so in 1995 we submitted a report to the Department of Energy uh, outlining the uh, the answers to those issues, or recommendations on those issues. And uh, we were very pleased that the Department of Energy accepted those so well.

01:27:40

A:

But the way that our group was organized was very important. We spent a lot of time involving the regulators and the DOE in helping, well we kind of all worked together on coming up with these recommendations. So that, because the DOE was part of the process, they would tell us any parameters that we would have to fall in. And so that helped a lot.

01:28:17

A:

And also we would ask them questions and we would get our responses well in advance of formulating our recommendations and the regulators the same way. And so, since all of us worked cooperatively to come up with the recommendations they stood a very, very good chance of being accepted. And that chemistry was very, very important.

01:28:42

A:

And also we started off by giving values that we had as stakeholders so that we found the common ground to build on to make the tough decision; especially the one about the On-Site Disposal Facility. The uh, the stakeholders pretty much at the very beginning said we want the site cleaned up and cleaned out. That the material would leave the site and it would, we wouldn't have to worry about it again.

01:29:15

A:

But by the time we looked at the values, looked at the overall picture of what it was going to cost, what kind of risks to the environment. Risks to the workers and the public and the time that it would take; the only decision that we could make intelligently was to recommend that a good bit of material remain on the site. Even though it was right above the sole source aquifer.

01:29:40

A:

We felt that if we could get the right kind of engineering we could keep the material there and save time and money and uh, and risks.

01:29:53

Q:

Great, we're going to take a break and change tapes.

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TAPE FLHP0141

02:01:02

A:

Now Joyce I hope you're on this tape or on at least some tape because you hear a voice and there's no face to go with the voice.

Q:

Yeah right. They do get my questions. When they do the transcripts the questions that I ask go on the transcripts.

A:

Of course the questions but I mean your face has to, you know we have to associate a face with it. (Comment not understandable). See you should have, you should have a chair you know so that the camera can pan to you for questions and then come to me for answers or replies or whatever.

02:01:34

Q:

I like being where I am.

A:

I know you do but that's too comfortable.

Q:

It is comfortable I'll tell ya. Uh, we were talking a little bit about the OSDF uh, if you can give us a little bit of the history of how that was decided? You've been in on the process pretty much from the ground up and it's been longer than most people realize that we've been talking about that.

02:01:54

A:

Uh, when we first decided that uh, that we needed to address where the wastes were going to go the overall opinion of we need to get all this stuff off the site basically came from the representatives on the task force that were members of the oh, forgot the name of it now, gee whiz. Can you cut this (laughter)?

02:02:28

Q:

Are you trying to think of an organization?

A:

Yes, the uh, oh Lisa Crawford group? (Comment - FRESH) FRESH, that's terrible I'd forgotten that. Anyway the FRESH representatives were very vocal, they're very organized anyway. And they're very vocal and they said, "we want this stuff off the site." Period, it has to be gone. And they came through loud and clear.

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02:02:52

A:

Many of the rest of us were trying to stay open minded about this and look at all the information. So you know we understood their values pretty well. And so we started to take a look at uh, the entire issue, as we could understand it the best way we could. And we felt that uh, our task force needed to be educated. Many of us did not have a good enough idea of what was going on out there at the site.

02:03:23

A:

So education was very important. But we didn't want to be bombarded with reams of documents and all that. Uh, we hired a technical support person to weed through all of this and give us the nitty-gritty and that helped us out a lot. It really cut down on the amount of work we had to do to come up to speed, to understand the issue very carefully.

02:03:50

A:

And uh, we, we had to make the decision of, or recommendation of how clean should the water be, how clean should the soil be. Once we got that taken care of then we started looking at how much material would have to be moved? How much of a risk will that be to the workers and to the community? How long is this going to take? And the numbers started to become astronomical.

02:04:21

A:

And John Applegate and I believe, I can't recall exactly who else, devised a game and this game used Lego's to indicate quantities of material. And so we had a map of the site and these Lego blocks put on there and so that we had a three-dimensional visualization of how much material we're talking about. And it blew us away. The amount of material that would have to be moved, to move everything would be tremendous.

02:05:02

A:

We, we uh, took that information and figured out how many trainloads or carloads, train carloads it would take. How many years would it take? How many trucks? We got figures on how many possible deaths would occur along the route to move this material. It just got to be an overwhelming task. And that this site would be actively moving material for decades.

02:05:36

A:

So it became fairly clear that the only thing we can do is keep the least reactive materials here. If we could get an engineering firm that would give us a disposal facility and the best geology on the site that would contain this material and keep it out of the aquifer we felt that it would be a good idea to keep the majority of that material here.

02:06:05

A:

Send the hottest stuff somewhere else for disposal. And also as we began to communicate with other sites we saw that their point of view that they didn't want our stuff. They pretty much wanted us to

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keep our own waste, deal with it ourselves not to pass it on to them. Even though places out west had a better geology for keeping this material.

02:06:37

A:

And we developed a pretty good, a very good association with the Nevada Test Site Citizens Advisory Board. And they realized our situation, having this stuff right on top a sole source aquifer, that really this was not good and that they had a better place to put it. And so we worked with them saying we're not going to send you everything we have, we're just going to send the stuff we don't feel we can manage that well.

02:07:15

A:

And so we had a very good working relationship with them and we still do. And whenever there was an incident with a white metal box we got in touch with them immediately and they understood our situation and we understood their concerns. And so we had it resolved, stakeholder to stakeholder, well before the DOE had it resolved.

02:07:43

A:

And uh, we feel very good about the relationships we have with other stakeholder groups that in the receiving end of nuclear materials. Uh, the On-Site Disposal Facility was endorsed by uh, all the members of the advisory board with I believe the exception of one and we did put that in our report. All of the members of the FRESH organization did vote to have a On-Site Disposal Facility even though we realize that not everyone in their organization was in favor of keeping some of the material on site.

02:08:28

A:

And uh, we are uh, very pleased with the way the cells have been developed and are being put down and we've been kept abreast of the progress that's going on there; the controls that are going on there. And so the Department of Energy and the regulators have been very good at keeping us apprised of the progress of this.

02:08:58

A:

Because to citizens that's one of the most important things that's going on on that site is the material that's going into that On-Site Disposal Facility. And that the integrity of that thing remains so that it will be protective of the environment.

02:09:15

Q:

Great. And you mentioned the game; first of all if you could tell us the name of the game and then also how did you use that as a tool.

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A:

I was afraid you were going to ask me that otherwise I wouldn't have told you. Do you remember what it was? (Comment – Cleanupoly) Cleanupoly is that it? Okay I knew it had a very uh, catchy name to it. And we used it at a workshop to, to allow us to you know manipulate some of the variables, to get an appreciation for the task.

02:09:45

A:

And that, that, that game really lead me to the realization that hey, we have to deal with some of this material on the site. And we knew that this was going to be a tough sell for the community. Uh, time and time again whenever uh, FRESH organization would be quoted in a newspaper they would say "we need to get this stuff off the site" time and time again.

02:10:12

A:

So the community is pretty well ingrained with the perception that we have an organization that's very strong that wants to get this stuff moved off the site. Well now it appears that, that, that the perception may be changing a bit from those people that have the knowledge. So now we have to educate the people to see what kind of support we would have with this idea of keeping some of it on site.

02:10:40

A:

So we set up some workshops. And they were hosted by the task force. We had the Department of Energy and the engineers all there to answer questions, to show what this was going to look like, how it, the types of materials would be used so that people could handle the materials to see how strong they were. Uh, to see some models of how it would be instructed.

02:11:09

A:

An opportunity to ask questions that maybe we didn't get to ask or forgot to ask or didn't know to ask. Uh, and also we were there to listen to the public so that we would take into account their perceptions and their feelings in the decisions and recommendations that we would be making. And I think they went very well. We didn't get maybe the turnout that we were expecting but we got a lot of people out there voicing legitimate concerns and hopefully they were getting the answers that they needed.

02:11:50

A:

Uh, I think that uh, the openness of the Department of Energy and the regulators and the task force to the public made them feel more comfortable. We weren't trying to jam something down their throats, we wanted some legitimate reaction to a proposal and it became very positive. Uh, when we finally made our recommendation in 1995 there were very, very few people in the community that said, "you made a mistake."

02:12:23

A:

Most people said, "I think you made the right decision." And so we felt very confident in, in the manner in which we went about doing, in making those recommendations. And that seems to be the

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strength of our advisory board. We changed from task force to advisory board in the last year or two because of our changing emphasis.

02:12:49

A:

And all throughout the process we wanted to make sure that it was very open because early on the Department of Energy was not open at all. They kept things pretty much to themselves, only on a need to basis. Now if anything happens the stakeholders are contacted personally at the very beginning, probably even before the media is alerted.

02:13:15

A:

And so that we know what's going on in case anyone in the community asks us questions. So the whole idea of openness and education has, has changed dramatically over the last several years. And we use it on our advisory board as the basis for any recommendations or decisions that have to be made.

02:12:41

Q:

And what were some of those concerns with the community and putting the OSDF on site?

A:

Well a lot of it was the fact that it sits right on top of the aquifer. And the aquifer is contains billions of gallons of water flowing past the site every day. It's a tremendous water source for the area and the City of Cincinnati. Um, it's a relatively pristine aquifer. We certainly didn't want to contaminate it with uranium.

02:14:16

A:

We know that it's already being contaminated but we wanted that stopped and cleaned up. But we didn't want any material to leach down through and get into that. Another concern of the people was the fact that it was still there. Here we have some, a possible cancer-causing agent that is not being removed but kept right there in the community.

02:14:45

A:

And that's another thing, the proximity of the community. Within several hundred feet of the, of the cell would be homes. Also people were concerned about the image. We're talking about something that's very, very large that looks like a huge mound that would be seen and whenever people would drive by they would see this thing and be reminded of what is there and what has happened in the past.

02:15:17

A:

So it would be harder for people to forget the past because this would be kind of a monument to the Cold War and what went on there.

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02:15:28

Q:

Wow. And um tell me a little bit what, well not just yourself but what most people would like to see done with that land once all the buildings are torn down.

A:

Uh, this spring the advisory board had an open meeting with the public and the topic was the future use of the site. How will the site be used after it's cleaned up; the part that would not be part of on-site disposal facility and not part of the settlement with the State of Ohio for damaged to the environment.

02:16:09

A:

Uh, the meeting went quite well. We intend to hold many more meetings, as many meetings as we feel necessary to educate the public and to what the possibilities are. And also as many meetings as necessary to, to get a good consensus of what the public would like to see. In our recommendations in 1995 the advisory board did set forth some restrictions.

02:16:41

A:

One of them being that there will be no residential housing on that property and secondly that there be no agriculture conducted on that property. Because there will be some residual radioactivity there in some areas of the soils because of the cleanup level that we established. We felt that we could not go to zero that it was probably unattained and getting close to zero would be uh, very costly and time consuming.

02:17:15

A:

And so we set a cleanup level that would be basically safe for most activities like light industry, park type settings and whatever. Uh, so we're trying to get from the public you know what would you like to see and we've gotten some suggestions from the public. Uh, some of them have been interesting and we can pursue it such as a light industrial park possibly in some areas of it.

02:17:45

A:

Especially there's 23 acres that may not be used and has already been certified I believe clean. Um, we have already recommended that the American Indians, Native Americans use some of the property to reenter some of the remains that has been dug up in the past as part of the cleanup effort at the site and uh, other related activities.

02:18:20

A:

We've already been contacted to permit or to make a recommendation to permit more American, Native American burials, reburials be done on the site. Many universities their institutions have uh, considerable numbers of remains that should be reentered but there's really no place for it. Federal ground is protected and so therefore this would be a logical place.

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02:18:56

A:

Uh, there is an entire organization that's looking into that. There's always a possibility too that the history of the Fernald experience should be chronicled in some sort of a possible museum or interpretive center or whatever to let people in the community and elsewhere know the role that Fernald had in the Cold War.

02:19:27

A:

Also the people in the community say well there's a lot of history in this area and maybe we could have some type of interpretive center or museum whatever to take a look at the influence of the early settlers, the influence of the Native Americans in this area as well. So these are some things that have come out. Also there are um some people who feel that this would be a nice nature area.

02:19:54

A:

Uh, with the settlement with the State of Ohio they're reestablishing wetlands and forested areas and prairie grounds, which would be very good areas to, to visit for those people, who like to hike. Also it could be an educational area for schools in the area including the universities who might want to do studies on succession on plants and animals.

02:20:21

A:

Or reestablishing prairies and that after land has been cleaned up and needs to be reclaimed. So we're still very open on how the, the uh, property will be used in the future. We're getting some better ideas of what the community likes and what they don't like. They don't like uh, paved roads going through it. There's always some skepticism about the amount of residual material that would be there that may be a health risk.

02:21:03

A:

And may be a liability to the site, to the government should someone contract the disease and try to say that it came from the site even though chances are miniscule. So uh, we're open to that.

02:21:22

Q:

Tell us about this whole Native American burial situation started and where it ended up?

A:

Well, let me see how that came about. I believe the first time I heard about it was through Joe Schomaker who came uh, as a someone who knew about, he's an American Indian himself and knows a lot about the culture of the area. And spoke to the advisory board with a suggestion that the, the site was digging a pipeline to supply water to residents in the area whose wells were affected by the groundwater contamination.

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02:22:15

A:

And uh, in doing so they came upon some artifacts, some early American, Native American remains. And so they needed to be reburied. In many cases I believe a lot of the stuff was put back as soon as the pipeline was put in it was put back in the same place. But there were some remains that had to be exhumed and now the, something had to be done with it and the only one in the area that seemed to have the expertise was Joe Schomaker.

02:22:48

A:

And his suggestions was that we recommend to the Department of Energy to reinter these bodies on the site in an area which will be uh, unaffected in the future. And that it would be a good idea because being protected they didn't have to worry about people coming in and disturbing the grave sites. And we felt that that was a very good thing to do for the Native Americans.

02:23:21

A:

Also it, we knew that the area was not going to be disturbed again and so the northern forested area was, was designated for the reburial I believe of three bodies or the skeletal remains and any artifacts that went with it. Then after that we got to thinking well maybe this ought to be expanded a bit. I mean this is uh, you know subsequent discussions with Joe Schomaker we realized there was quite a need for Indian tribes that were located in Ohio or passed through Ohio.

02:24:00

A:

And so now we said well what we want to do is look into expanding that a bit and allowing more burials on the site. And he now is working for Fernald and uh; he is in charge of documenting sites on the Fernald property that were, had artifacts or remains of Native Americans that should be chronicled. And it is very interesting.

02:24:40

A:

The history and that that we're learning about early American settlements right there on our site, right there at the Fernald property. And so we're very optimistic that more will be done in that area. Of course a lot of it has to do with funding and getting the tribes and that to agree. None of tribes uh, could claim those, those three individuals that were buried up there so they had to go through a process and the decision was made that they could be put on site.

02:25:18

A:

So I envision that more Native American remains will be reintered on the site in the future. And the public has backed that quite a bit and so we think that is going to be a positive for the area.

02:25:37

Q:

Were you at the interment ceremony?

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A:

No. No I wasn't. I had to work that day. I believe I was invited. But uh, I think it was very well done the ceremony and that was done exactly the way the Native Americans wanted it done. It uh, I think it was an excellent gesture on the part of the Department of Energy to do that.

02:26:04

A:

Maybe other sites across the country will consider that as well as they clean up. It's difficult for the Native Americans to you know reinter their people and it's very important to them, it's part of their culture. And so we need to be very aware of that and sympathetic to that.

02:26:30

Q:

Great. Um, let's see. Oh, um throughout your years working in the Fernald area and you know working with FCAB and the other organizations you're working with, what has been your experience and your contact with workers like the site workers?

02:26:57

A:

Uh, most of the site workers that I've had an opportunity to talk to have been those people who have volunteered in our Partnership in Education Program. And uh, that way I got a chance to talk with a lot of the people who worked on various projects at the site. Most of them were scientists and engineers. Back in 19- and I have to look at this here, 1992 uh, I took part in a Teacher at Federal Facilities Program.

02:27:27

A:

Uh, called the TAFF Program on site. This is for educators to work at the site on small projects to get us to have little more familiarity of what was going on on site. Also to help with some of the site programs. I worked with Sue Walpole with Partnership in Education developing some new sessions and kind of formalizing the sessions that we already had.

02:27:58

A:

Which also gave me an opportunity to talk to a lot of the people on the site and I took all of the training courses that any worker would out there. Uh, so I was in classes learning about radioactivity and safety issues and all of that, able to talk to them on that. Having lunch out there on the site so if you're actually working out there you have a lot of interaction with people.

02:28:23

A:

Uh, people that I had known from uh, elsewhere that I had met there on the site. Uh, had very good relationships with people on the site. I was very impressed. When I first started to work out there on this TAFF Program my wife was very apprehensive about me being on the site and being exposed. But when I went through all that training and that I realized these people are very safety conscious.

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02:28:53

A:

I felt very safe out there. And I've had no anxiety whatsoever about being out there. In fact my daughter has even worked out there doing an internship for a college class. And she felt the same way that do the training and the professionalism of the people that are out there, she had no concerns.

02:29:14

Q:

That's great. We're going to take a little bit of a break and change tapes again.

TAPE FLHP0142

03:01:04

Q:

So tell us a little bit about your impressions of security through the years.

A:

Security has changed a lot over the time that I started there uh, being involved in things at the site. I don't remember exactly the year but at one time there was a tour of the site and it may have just been done by invitation I don't even think it was relatively open to anyone who wanted to come in.

03:01:32

A:

But I was part of a group that was going to tour the site and uh, you did not leave sight of security and time you were on the site. And we went through and we saw a lot of the, where the process took place. We saw a derby and all that and there were these rubber mats that you had to walk on, you could not step off that mat as I recall 'cause you could become contaminated.

03:02:03

A:

And supposedly you know so everyone had to walk you know almost in single file. And I do recall a story of one person who purposefully walked off to get contaminated as part of a news story or something. But we were well aware of the security was going to watch you all the way and you kind of sensed that there were cameras on you or something because you were in a very sensitive thing.

03:02:32

A:

Well before you could get on the site you had to fill out forms. They wanted all about you, evidently to run some sort of a character check on you of some kind. And uh, that may have been even pre to getting on to the site but when you were on site you had the form you had to fill out. One of the things on the form was who to contact in case of an accident or injury.

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03:02:59

A:

And so I got to thinking well you know if something, if an accident or something happens on this site a very important person ought to know about it. So I put down Bruce Boswell who was the highest ranking person I knew of on site. So I put down Bruce Boswell and so I handed in my paper and this guard looked at it and he looked at somebody else and pretty soon these armed guards are around me.

03:03:27

A:

And he said are you being funny? And I said no sir. I said if something happens on this site I want this guy to know. And they were kind of ready to escort me right off the site. I guess I wasn't a good character or something but they did let me continue on and finish that up. When I began working at the site as part of this TAFF Program, Teachers at Federal Facilities, when I'd come on the site you had to go through all kinds.

03:03:56

A:

Of course you'd have your badge and you had to have it checked and there was an armed guard there who you had to state your business. And if you brought anything in they'd check through your belongings. Even when you left the site you had to go through the same routine again. They had to check all your stuff before you could leave.

03:04:20

A:

And then as time went on even in 1994 security started to, to relax a bit. They opened another gate that you could get in to. Uh, the guards didn't check but only periodically they would check things and over time it has changed even more. They didn't seem to have the weapons any more. All you had to do was kind of flash your badge.

03:04:50

A:

Uh, and they let you right on the site. Certainly the security was still there for the quote unquote "dirty side." That you know you couldn't just waltz anywhere you wanted on that site. And you shouldn't be able to. I mean for your own safety and the safety of others. There has to be some sort of security because of the nature of the material that is there.

03:05:11

A:

But as far as getting on to the site and going to meetings or whatever that has opened up a lot. In fact uh, our advisory board and our committees that are associated with the Fernald Citizens Advisory Board are held on site in buildings which were much more like in the Large Lab Building where we have our board meetings. I worked there in '92 and that was more or less even though it was on the clean side it was not, you had to be escorted to that building.

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03:05:45

A:

Now you just walk to the building and anyone who comes on gets a little visitor's tag and they just walk to the building. Security is much more relaxed I should say. There's still security there and there should be security there.

03:06:03

Q:

Great. And uh, tell us now what your current situation is with FCAB and how you got there.

A:

Uh, couple of years ago I was asked to be the vice-chair of Fernald Citizens Advisory Board. Uh, John Applegate who is the chair asked if I would assume that role. He felt that, he had been there for every single meeting since its inception, however he felt that there may be situations that would arise that would not permit him to be at every meeting and needed someone who would be able to take over the meeting.

03:06:46

A:

So I accepted. Uh, then about a year later John had an opportunity to move from University of Cincinnati to Illinois, Indiana Bloomington Indiana to take over a position there with the university. And which meant that he would be too far away really to run the advisory board. So I was elected by the advisory board to step up as the advisory board chair.

03:07:20

A:

Tom Wagner, who is a professor at UC accepted the position of vice-chair. So since for the last year or two I've been the chair.

03:07:36

Q:

What are your responsibilities with the FCAB?

A:

Well basically it's, it's not only conducting the meetings but being kind of the liaison for the advisory board. I attend chairs meetings that the complex holds. Help organizing future chair meetings and to uh, basically speak to the media on issues that the advisory board has made. Issues that are occurring on the site and also to, to attend the meetings and participate and help set up workshops and the like with our support people at the site and the support people that are associated with the advisory board.

03:08:30

Q:

What do you see as the biggest challenge between now and the time that Fernald is cleaned up?

A:

The biggest challenge right now appears to be the future use of the site. What is the site going to look like when it's cleaned up and how is it going to be utilized. Uh, we're spending billions of dollars to

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clean the site up, do we want to have a billion dollar park. Do we want something to come of the site that will be as asset to the community?

03:09:02

A:

And so the decisions, that's going to be a very tough decision between now and 2008. And, six or eight and the thing is is that we have to get a pretty good grasp on that now so as cleanup occurs if anything needs to be done physically to the site that's it's done and it isn't something that will cause extra expenditures at the end.

03:09:34

A:

A lot of times if we know pretty much what the site is going to look like we can do that as part of the remediation and cut down the cost dramatically. So it's a decision that will need to be made in the next year or two.

03:09:52

Q:

Now in your estimation how has the site changed the surrounding community?

A:

Well the site has been very important to the community because so many of the, the residents worked at the site. And the perception of the site has changed a lot over time. People don't, I would say the general public is I would say they feel a little better about the way things are handled at the site, the openness of the DOE and the contractors.

03:10:35

A:

I think the people feel better about the way they've been dealt with by the DOE and the contractors. Uh, the property values, you know they were saying well the property values just gonna drop, well really they haven't they're going up. We have areas surrounding the site that's now becoming developed. There are plans now for the surrounding townships as to how, what their future use is going to be.

03:11:07

A:

And so I think Fernald is going to have to be a part of that as well because Fernald has been part of the community since 1950's. It's not going to just all go away, there's going to be some residual there. There's going to be some transition between the workers as, as we clean up the site we'll need less workers and therefore these people have to be transitioned into some other type of jobs.

03:11:33

A:

And we have a community reuse organization that has taken on a great bit of that responsibility to help these people adjust to a different type of occupation or to develop something new in the area that these people can associate with to finish out their working years.

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03:11:57

Q:

And what do you see as for the future for Fernald?

A:

I don't know yet. I think uh, I'm kind of in the middle in a sense because as the chair of the advisory board I give my feelings but I don't have any strong feelings of exactly they way I envision it to look. I don't see it as an amusement park or anything like that but I think that in light of the Native American burials, the restoration to the environment that it probably will have some type of a park-like look to it in the future. There will be something that will involve that.

03:12:46

Q:

Great. Well is there anything that you wanted to cover that we didn't cover? Any questions you wanted me to ask that I didn't quite get to or.

A:

I don't think so.

Q:

Anything you want to add.

A:

Not really.

03:12:57

Q:

Let me just ask you one more, before we do nat sound. Um, how do you feel about the Living History Project itself?

A:

Oh, I think it's a great idea. So much has gone on, there's so many people's lives who have been touched by the site and either working there or being, living close to it that it should be chronicled. I think that a lot of the information that will come out with the interviews could be used by people who investigate just what happened during the Cold War.

03:13:32

A:

How were people impacted by it. Uh, you know what types of activities took place good, bad and indifferent.

03:13:43

Q:

Terrific. Okay we're going to do what we call nat sound now. That just means we need quiet on the set for about 30 seconds. This is nat sound.