



Justin Fleming Oral History Interview, December 15, 2015

Title

“A Sustainability Pioneer at the Motor Pool”

Date

December 15, 2015

Location

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

Summary

In the interview, Fleming describes his upbringing in Aumsville, Oregon, his decision to attend Oregon State University, his transition to university studies, and his earliest involvement in sustainability issues. Fleming then reflects on the reasons why he attended school part-time, shares his memories of the creation of the Student Sustainability Initiative, and lends his perspective on the advancement of environmental sustainability actions during his years as an undergraduate.

From there, Fleming details his career advancement following his graduation from OSU. In so doing, he outlines his move into information technology work within OSU Business Services, his transfer to the OSU Motor Pool as a business analyst, and his hire into the manager's position at the Motor Pool.

Fleming next touches upon major changes within the Motor Pool during his years of association, including the absorption of the University of Oregon Motor Pool into a larger University Motor Pool that is managed at OSU. He likewise discusses the growth of the Motor Pool fleet, including the first inclusion in the fleet of electric vehicles and the continuing emphasis at the Motor Pool of environmental sustainability as a core value. Fleming then shares the details of archival research that he has conducted on the history of the Motor Pool at OSU, provides his sense of what the Motor Pool might look like in future years, and stresses the importance of customer service as a top priority for the unit.

As it nears its conclusion, the interview shifts focus to Fleming's volunteer activities as well as details of his family life and notes on his extracurricular activities, including his strong interest in new technologies. The session ends with Fleming's thoughts on the work culture at the Motor Pool, his appreciation of university history, and his excitement for technological advancement in the near future.

Interviewee

Justin Fleming

Interviewer

Mike Dicianna

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/fleming/>

Transcript

Mike Dicianna: Today is Tuesday, December 15th, 2015. And we have the pleasure and honor to interview Justin Fleming, class of 2006 – maybe 2007 –

Justin Fleming: – somewhere in there.

MD: Currently he is the manager of the University Motor Pool. We are at the Valley Library here on the OSU campus. My name is Mike Dicianna, I'm an oral historian for the OSU Sesquicentennial Oral History Project. Also present is my colleague Geoff Somnitz, who is with the Special Collections and Archive Research Center. And we are basically going to learn about you, the Motor Pool, and sustainability.

We always like to start with a short biographical sketch of our Beavers, like where and when where you born, early family life, childhood experiences.

JF: OK. So I'm an Oregonian, I was born in Salem in 1980. My parents are Robert and Janet Fleming. I grew up outside of Salem near a small town called Aumsville. So I went through the Aumsville school system, graduated from Cascade High School in Turner, and ended up at Oregon State.

MD: How about your school days and your high school days there?

JF: Sure. I was very involved in school, I played multiple sports – football, track. I was in student government, so graduated as the student body president from my high school. Had different roles in organizing events and activities. Started some new things, had a lot of fun, made a lot of friends. Kept some of them as we go along, lose some as you go. It was a good time.

MD: Did you always have a goal of attending college?

JF: I did. My original path was a little different. So I was a ROTC scholarship recipient, and this was pre-2001, and so the military had, I would say, somewhat higher standards. At some point in my senior year I became medically disqualified for a skin thing that I have, so the scholarships were taken back. So that changed my college trajectory a little bit, and I think that, if anything, I had to learn from that time period, because that was difficult. I had kind of put all the eggs in one basket for a long time, from middle school to high school that was the goal. So if anything, I think I probably learned adaptation from that.

Oregon State, even when I had the scholarship, was my intended destination. I was going to do the Computer Science program in the ROTC. Even without the scholarship, I came to OSU. I did change majors; I listed Business as my focus area. I did participate in the first year ROTC program hoping that I might be able to work something out, and ultimately I had to change directions. And that kind of led me into changing my relationship with OSU. So in my sophomore year, I began working as a student – like you Geoff – in Campus Recycling and Surplus Property programs. And I've been working with OSU since; I just finished my fifteenth year.

MD: So you came here in 1999 as a freshman.

JF: '99 and began working as a student in 2000.

MD: One of the things I always like to ask people, no matter what generation it is, they all have that seminal historical moment that has imprinted on them. And your generation, I think of 9/11, the Challenger disaster. Did those things imprint on you, much like Pearl Harbor or JFK's assassination?

JF: Some more strongly than others. I can remember the Challenger incident being on the family television, but I don't remember being that engaged at that time – I would have been six or seven at the time, I think. I do remember where and when I was when 9/11 occurred. I worked a series of farm labor jobs through high school. After high school, in the summers, I would work in orchards and transition into a hops warehouse in Hubbard, and I remember being in the office at the hops warehouse when the news came out. And the manager rushed out and bought a television so that we could watch the live coverage. And so yeah, we watched that unfold over the days and weeks.

And even that, because of when it happened, I can remember going to conferences when I was with the Recycling and Waste Management program, and hearing of, even some of the just functional things – there was obviously the immediate reaction in dealing with the injured, but then there was treating this as a giant crime scene and how you do the materials management for that. And I remember – and this was a conference at the Willamette Valley Vineyards, we were listening to a speaker – just some of the things that you wouldn't even imagine. Like they couldn't keep shoes on people because of the intense heat that had built up. The emergency workers were going through pairs of shoes just because of the explosion and the fires, the intense heat. So you imagine all the different careers that you might have and the things that you might run up against, and some of them you just can't imagine.

[0:05:30]

MD: When you came here to OSU as a wide-eyed freshman, you did start as a Business major. What was your living arrangement? Did you do the dorm thing?

JF: I did the dorm thing. I lived on, my first term – because I was very involved with the ROTC program – my first day of college, I signed up for what was called the Ranger Challenge Team. And so my first day of college was waking up at 5:30 in the morning to be at the fieldhouse so that we could do PT. Probably the first time I'd had to get myself out of bed that early. Also the first time I think I had run more than a mile. So that was a good experience and I developed a lot of camaraderie with the guys that were on the team. And a lot of them were in a fraternity house off-campus, so I actually ended up moving out of the dorm to the fraternity, the Sigma Nu fraternity, near campus.

Over a couple of months, I realized that the fraternity lifestyle wasn't my lifestyle and I ended up moving back to the dorm and finishing out the first year experience in McNary Hall.

MD: So as a Business major, who were some of your favorite professors, favorite classes, as you started to go through school?

JF: I did the Business major and then I did an Econ minor, and at the time they were still offering an Environmental Econ minor which was consistent with the work that I was doing with Campus Recycling. They dropped the Environmental part of the name, so it was just a general Econ minor, but I really did like the Environmental Econ courses. I think that that's shaped a lot of my business thinking since then. You have to really evaluate all of the inputs and outputs, and make objective decisions. There are times and places for value-based decisions as well, but I've tried to be as objective as possible with a lot of the things that I do.

MD: So this is fairly early in that program, isn't it? When they were starting this whole idea of sustainability and recycling and everything like that. It was fairly new.

JF: Yeah. The word "sustainability" hadn't developed its buzz potential at that point. I remember my supervisor, Brian Thorsness – and this was shortly after I started, because the role that I had was promotion and outreach for Recycling and Surplus Property. And I remember him coming over to my desk – and this was in the Surplus Property building over on 13th – and I remember him coming in and saying, "tell me what you know about sustainability." And I'd heard it, and I said, "well, I'm going to learn everything I can, and I'll tell you tomorrow." [laughs]

No, that was the beginning of the revival of previous movements, but that was when people really started talking about sustainability in Oregon. And Oregon was in the front-running for that search. So I committed myself whole-heartedly to it for a number of years, through several different roles, ending up as the recycling program manager. Starting different programs like the Student Sustainability Initiative. Had the pleasure of working with an individual at Allied Waste and we started the Linn-Benton Master Recycler Program, which I believe is still running. I've participated in other counties and their Master Recycler programs. Actually went out of state and became certified in Washington as a compost facility operator. I did a lot of outreach with the schools, so I worked with probably a half-dozen different Corvallis grade schools, going out and doing outreach in the K through, the highest grade I did was probably fourth or fifth, doing worm bins and things like that. I've given a lot of talks. It was a formative part of my life.

MD: So it became, along with Business, it really became a main focus.

JF: Well, that's where I think that those Environmental Econ classes hit me at the right time, because they connected the two parts of my life at that time – the environmental and social responsibility side, with some business logic and thinking.

[0:10:08]

MD: So you're 1999 through '06, '07 era here, so we've got a long period of time that you're an undergrad, for all intents and purposes. What caused the changes there?

JF: Well, like I said, that was a time where my relationship with the university was changing. So I started as a student employee and quickly fell in love with the work more than the school. At some point, and I'm not sure I could ever pinpoint when it happened, it occurred to me or I had this realization that you don't have to rush out of college. I think so many people, it's ingrained that college is a four-year process, you come in, you go out. And a lot of people do that, and in some ways I'm selfish and I kind of like that because it keeps Corvallis...Corvallis. But I think that there are people who realize that – I know it sounds corny to say it's a journey – but it doesn't have to be done in four years. It can be done like I did it, in seven or eight years, however long it was. Or you find yourself blinking and suddenly you've been here sixteen years. And I think the longer you're here, if you're doing what you love, the more you love being here.

But in those early 2000s, I was the Student Recycling Program person. Eventually transitioned to a temporary classified position – so kind of a step up, because at that time there wasn't a recycling manager here. And around 2004, I stepped up to the recycling manager role. As kind of transitional during that time, I started working with the student incidental fees process, working a lot with ASOSU. I brought back the Earth Week celebration that has continued to grow. I remember as a milestone, in I think 2002, we had forty, I think forty-plus different organizations participating in Earth Week. And I'm pleased that, of some of the things that I've worked on, some of these like that, like the Student Sustainability, has continued and grown.

MD: Have grown big-time to one of the premiere organizations for that in the West, at least.

JF: It was a fun time. The truth behind the Student Sustainability Initiative is more of a typo than anything. It actually started, it was being modeled after a fee that passed at the University of Oregon to support their recycling program. And so when I first went through the fee process, I worked with a GEO 300 instructor, Steve Cook, and we did an informal poll of campus to see willingness to support that type of effort. And so what we originally proposed and passed, I think, was an eighty-five cent per term fee which, even at eighty-five cents being, I think at the time, one of the smallest fees, was 90 or \$100,000 a year. And we used that to buy hundreds, thousands of recycling bins, and we created a couple of positions.

But the student fee process is transitional – you're working with a rollover of students per year. And some way, over the summer, when it was translated from one spring to the next fall, it went from being the recycling resource fee or something along those lines, to the sustainability fee. And so that's when it really clicked for me that that was the topic that would pull a lot of things together. That recycling is a tool among a large toolset for addressing some of the world's problems. But it really made sense to focus at a higher level. And so that's actually what transpired into the Student Sustainability Initiative.

It took a couple of years to really get it rooted. A new fee really hadn't been passed in a long time, the infrastructure wasn't necessarily there at the Memorial Union, or the institutional knowledge to say, "this is how you start a new fee board." And so we actually went back the second year and hadn't spent anything, because we hadn't built any of those processes. And so we went back, and to try to demonstrate integrity and accountability, we requested a zero fee. And so we actually just rolled the original funding over until we finally had the infrastructure built up, we had the fee board. And sometime around then, and I don't recall the exact year, we acquired the use of space in a house on 15th street. So that gave us a physical presence, and that's when things really started rolling along. That's when I worked with two or three engineering students on their senior project; they built the solar trailer, which you may have seen.

[0:15:24]

MD: Oh yeah, so that was built by students?

JF: Designed and built by students. I was the one behind the scenes, processing the invoice payments. I couldn't provide them engineering, etc., but I could provide them some of the support. And so actually I worked with them. They had kind of a cross-country trip with the trailer when it was completed; they borrowed one of the Campus Recycling trucks and drove around and took some footage with the idea of putting together some sort of short film; I'm not sure whatever came out of that.

But I got to work with, we had a grant program. So we started the grant program because what we really wanted to do – it was almost like micro-lending – we wanted to provide seed money to spur things along. So I got to work with a grad student on her project, so if you go out the Oak Creek Center for Urban Horticulture on 35th street, they're kind of abandoned now, but you'll see about thirty green roofs. So she built elevated structures to study green roof design. I got to work with a lot of exciting projects at that time.

MD: There's more to sustainability than throwing your pop cans in a bin.

JF: Right, there's a lot more. It was a fun time.

MD: And the program has grown. I see that in the 2012, the *Princeton Review* named us to its honor roll for the sixteen most environmentally responsible colleges.

JF: Yeah.

MD: It must be rewarding to look back on where sustainability at OSU is today and your part in moving that along.

JF: And just to point out, it was a small part, because there are a lot of great people on campus working on it. You've got Brandon Trelstad in the Sustainability Office coordinating it at a much higher level than where I was working, but we were definitely collaborators. But there have been a lot of great people and we wouldn't be in the *Princeton Review* if there weren't dozens or hundreds of great people working on it.

MD: At this point today, what is your involvement with the program? Are you kind of floating above it and looking down and saying, "hey, this is great?"

JF: Yeah, I watch it from afar. Periodically, like I said, with the rollover of students, someone will see my name and realize that I'm still on campus and want to ask me some questions about it. So I still see them, and it's funny for me – one of the things that we deal with Motor Pool as a self-support entity, is we see people's funding sources when they make a rental. And so I'll periodically see what we call an index number float across the desk, and the description pops up as SSI something, and I'll go, "oh, I wonder if they even know who I am?" [laughs]

MD: Well, when you search sustainability at OSU, your name is one of the top on the list, which is impressive. Did you guys run into any kickback when you were trying to put these fees together? Was there a big debate or was this kind of a slam dunk?

JF: It was a debate. At that time, we had two different – we had the undergraduate Senate and the graduate Senate, and I think there was a lot more pushback in the graduate Senate. And it's interesting, I can appreciate it more now, now that I work more with grads and post-grads, they were debating over things like the structure of the survey, and things that I wasn't trained in at the time. So that's what I can say that it was an informal poll, it wasn't a survey. It was over those types of issues. And ultimately, it went to an executive decision, as I recall. It passed, I think, the undergrad, but not the grad. And so it went into mediation, which was a separate process. And I don't recall all the details, but I remember that it was a much smaller adjudicating unit, I think, as an executive decision, that ended up passing it. And I believe the president at that time was Bridget Burns, so I give her a lot of credit, if it was her, for pushing that through.

But I think what we were able to demonstrate over the next several years, like I said, by demonstrating integrity and accountability, I remember going through multiple fee reviews where it was unanimous, where there were no dissenting opinions among the entire organization.

[0:20:02]

MD: They realized the value of it and that it's worth devoting student fees to.

JF: Right.

MD: As you go through this process from 1999 through, where you working and taking classes, and basically just working your way through?

JF: I was. I looked less and less like a traditional student the further we get into the 2000s. I was still a full-time student as long as possible – typical financial aid and loans. Eventually I wasn't able to maintain that full-time status, and so I was going part-time. I was also, somewhere in there, getting married and having a wife that was going to OSU, and so you're talking about two college plans you're trying to do. So I scaled back in order for her to go full-time. That also allowed me to work more, which is where that passion was at the time. So I really poured myself into a series of jobs that I had the department, until I ultimately found the job at Motor Pool, and I've been there since.

MD: Did you end up walking with your class?

JF: I didn't. By the time I graduated, it was several years after individuals that I would have attended classes regularly with. I did end up being a commencement volunteer, so I got to relive the experience a little bit, doing some stage management and set-up of the stadium, so that was fun. But no, I tell all of my student employees, "walk."

MD: I forced Geoff into that.

JF: Whether you see the value in it now or not, I think that most people come to regret not walking, later. I'm not sure what it is that it provides you – a sense of accomplishment or closure or both – but I think that something's missing when you don't walk at commencement.

MD: So you've had this career concurrent with being a student, what brought you to the Motor Pool, where you're at now?

JF: It wasn't a direct path. When I was the Recycling – in all of the three various stages of being with Recycling and Waste Management – there was kind of a void in our IT program. So in order to a lot of the things that I wanted to do, I needed technology support. And at that time, or previous to that time, there had been a consolidation of – this sounds extremely boring – but there was a consolidation of IT functions within the division. And so people that we had as local resources were moved out into this kind of amorphous group. And I've seen the pendulum swing back and forth a few times, but there's always the argument that we'll be more efficient and lean in a centralized organization. And in most of the experiences I've had, if services haven't gone down, it's changed. And so, because of that change, I really started editing web pages and doing things I had never done before. So I did a lot of self-teaching.

I was appointed to the Technology Resource Fee Committee by the Provost to work. That process has changed too, but I got a lot of exposure at a high level to how we were funding technology innovation on campus. I participated in the Finance Administration Technology Review Team, where there was funds made available. But slowly started to build my IT acumen until I was able to get some funding approval to create a Business Analyst position in Business Services. And I applied and was the first Business Analyst for the department. So I transitioned from Campus Recycling to this Business Analyst role.

Upon taking that job – I had already been working on a lot of those projects as the recycling manager because that function wasn't available, so I had already been working with a lot of the units like Printing and Mailing, and Procurement, and Risk Management, etc. But when I took the job as the Business Analyst, we had just transferred the Motor Pool from Facilities Services to Business Services. We had been working with it for several years. I worked with Brian Thorsness to write a lot of the letters to justify – they were actually looking at outsourcing it in 2004, and we justified keeping it internally, and transferring it to our department.

They hired a manager, he left shortly after, so there was kind of a management vacuum. So while I was the Business Analyst, I was relocated to the Motor Pool to work on IT and infrastructure projects there. So as the Business Analyst, I implemented the new fleet software, the automated fuel system, did a lot of website work. So it was after that time period that they advertised for Motor Pool manager, and having spent almost a year there on site, I did move back to my original

building. But I developed a lot of strong relationships, I met a lot of the customers, and applied for the job. And I'm still loving it.

[0:25:26]

MD: You're listed as the manager of the University Motor Pool, because now our Motor Pool encompasses both the OSU campus as well as that other school down the road – they had some cars sitting around that you're now in charge of. What's that process? What happened there?

JF: So you might remember that there were some rough financial times in 2008. Well, one of the exercises that the state went through was to identify different levels of cuts – OSU did something similar. It went by different names: 80-10-10, 80-20, whatever variation the organization went through, you would identify what you would cut at different levels. The state identified cuts that included their Portland and Eugene motor pool, so they had operated one in Portland, Salem, and Eugene, the largest being Salem, that's their main location. Ultimately they decided to cut both Portland and Eugene.

I had been with the Motor Pool about a year as the manager, a little less. And the U of O came to me, their Public Safety department came to me, because they were a heavy user of the Eugene motor pool, and they were searching out options because they didn't know what they were going to do to replace that service. Brian Thorsness and I went down to Eugene and gave about an hour presentation, showing them some of the web tools that we had built and how we were operating things. And this was to a group of maybe thirty or forty stakeholders from across the U of O campus. What ultimately ended up happening is we ended up leasing a lot of vehicles from the state. We partnered over the venture, we leased the building, we operated it as a temporary solution while they continued to evaluate their options. So we went down there with around sixty vehicles. I was down there every day from seven in the morning to six at night, keeping it going. They ultimately ended up purchasing the property when it went up for sale, and we're currently in a five-year agreement with a five-year extension.

So we've been operating two motor pools since 2009. I like to say one motor pool with two locations, because we're really trying hard to keep the same culture around service. But it's been a lot of fun. You would think as much as we talk about "our friends to the south" and all the jokes that get made back and forth, we really don't know much about the school. Because the school is not the team. The school is not the football program, it's not the basketball program. It's all the things that go on on campus every day, and you find yourself having to translate from one school to the other, because you get used to it being the Environmental Sciences program. Well, it might be something different at U of O and it might have different parts. So it's understanding those nuances and relationships, because ultimately the school is a very human organization.

MD: Yeah, it's the people.

JF: But we don't just work with OSU and U of O, we work with other outside agencies. So we're working with community colleges all up and down the Willamette Valley, high schools, other state agencies. We rent vehicles to over sixty external organizations.

MD: So they can utilize, like, a van, for a team...

JF: Essentially any public business. We have some guidelines that encourage us to keep the external amount of activity under a certain level, so that our primary focus, as it should, remains on serving OSU. But in order to build a better service for OSU, if we're able to leverage those external uses, we can build a larger fleet with more variety than we could justify if we didn't.

MD: Let's talk about this fleet. One of the things that I found interesting was an article in 2009 about the use of hybrids and developing a program through Nissan with their electric cars, and setting up the plug-in stations. Where is that at right now?

[0:29:52]

JF: I purchased the first electric vehicles for the campus, the low-speed electric vehicles. And so we purchased two Taylor-Dunn Electrucks in 2005; those are still in use today. Over several different purchasing cycles, I added more low-

speed electric vehicles. And I think if I could go back and talk to myself of that year or those years, I'd say, "wait. The technology isn't there yet." We have had mixed experiences, but we have found is that the batteries are still what's holding back the transition. If we just look at battery replacement costs, we're looking at costs in excess of a dollar a mile. So that's where that Environmental Econ keeps slapping me in the back of the head to say, "what else could you be spending that dollar a mile on?" Because a dollar a mile starts to make your worst gas-guzzling truck look like an environment all-star, because of the savings that you were generate just by switching back to it. So what I would probably go back and say is, "hey, wait. The highway speed electric vehicles, and the dual-fuel vehicles, and the hybrid vehicles, they're coming, they're just still a few years away. Focus those expenditures on something that would get somebody out of a twenty mile per gallon car and put them in a thirty mile per gallon car." Because that makes a huge difference.

And so that's really where our focus has been since those early learning experiences, is that we've focused on not the fifty mile per gallon car, we have some of those. We're focusing on the thirty-five mile per gallon car because we can put almost two on the road for the cost of the fifty mile per gallon car, and that gets people out of their cars. Because a huge part of our transportation footprint is people driving their personal vehicle and being reimbursed. And you lose a lot of control, accountability, you lose a focus on environmental efficiency, on safety, on a lot of things that you can manage when you're managing it out in front of everyone. And that's really what the Motor Pool does is it pulls all those transportation parts out of the dark and puts them in front where everyone can look at it and measure it and have an opinion about it.

MD: I know that we have a number of the mid-sized Fords that get thirty miles to the gallon. So when it pencils out, that extra ten miles per gallon, even at the cost of gas, it pays.

JF: Yeah, what you're looking at is a difference in upfront costs. What I like to tell people is, when you're buying currently, with our price incentives – and it's different for a fleet that can get the government price concessions – but if we're buying a hybrid, essentially we're financing our gas costs up front. So if we're comparing the Prius, which we have in the fleet and will continue to have, to even just the Ford Fusion, which we have a lot of, it's a difference of almost \$10,000 up front. You're paying \$10,000 more for the Prius. And so you have to drive them an extreme amount of miles before you realize the savings of the Prius. And I may be remembering the Environmental Econ wrong, but what I remember is there's an advantage of having the savings up front, because it gives you more time to do something with them. So what we're choosing to do with them is take those up front savings to put more fuel-efficient cars on the road.

MD: Well, in today's climate, you're able to monitor gas mileage and miles driven for all of the vehicles put together.

JF: The other advantage that we have as a fleet is that – we put a lot of miles on cars, we have cars doing over 30,000 miles a year. So the turnover of cars can be faster than what you might find in a personal situation. And so you might not want to make a decision now, knowing that you're going to be stuck with that decision for ten or fifteen years in a personal situation. Whereas, we can say, "we want to go with this option now, because we know that the technology is changing fast enough that we're going to be able to replace it with technology x in five years."

MD: One of the things, where we met, is you've been researching the history of the OSU Motor Pool.

JF: I have.

MD: So you're somewhat of an authority on the history of it, and it would behoove our collection of oral histories to have a little bit of historical background on the use of motor vehicles at the college, in a nutshell.

JF: So the reason why I did the research, I'd have to go back to what got me started. And what got me started was having the best customer base on campus. So when you're standing at the counter at the Motor Pool, every fifteen minutes you can change subject matter to something entirely different. So you can be talking to somebody that's going to go to Newport for the day to go out and launch submersibles. Or in the next fifteen minutes, you can be talking to someone that's measuring snags in McDonald Forest or any number of topics, anything that you can imagine.

[0:35:23]

But the thing that threads through and connects them all is that it's all field and observation based. They do their secondary research and there are times of the year when they disappear into their labs and we don't see them, but then for

some part of the year or parts of the year, they're going out and exploring the world. And that's fascinating for me. That's why it's so fun for me to turn on an *Oregon Field Guide* or any of the other programs and you'll be watching along, and all of the sudden you'll see a whole bunch of fish biologist – "I know him!" [laughs]

MD: "That's my vehicle!"

JF: And so that's really what got me excited about it. And what I realized during the research is that we've been that way as long as there were cars. We've been exploring the world, by automobile largely, for the last century, from coast to coast. We have people back in Alabama, I talked to someone yesterday. And it's down to Texas and up to northern Alberta, Canada, and down into Mexico. We are only limited by the ocean. And so that's been fascinating for me to be a part of, to work with anthropologists, and Fish and Wildlife, foresters – College of Forestry is a huge part of our program. And so I started to almost think of them as our drivers, because I'm proud of them.

So that led me to blogging about them, and then it did lead me to Archives, because I really wanted to know what our origin story was. I had found bits and pieces over the years. At some point, I had found a clip that the Ag Carpool, which we were called, burned down on Monroe Street. And so, without more clues, I assumed, "well, we must have been over on Monroe Street." And I didn't know for how long until you helped me in Archives, we traced that a little further back. We were the Ag Carpool without a location until we rented the Monroe Street garage. And a year later, it caught on fire. [laughs]

"Well, what before that?" So we did finally trace it back to being established in 1934. We were part of the Ag Experiment Station, we were called the Ag Carpool. It had kind of an "other duties as assigned" director until 1954, when the Ag Carpool was built. It was built following the fire on Monroe Street, it was built in its current location. And it remained the Ag Carpool until around 1970, when it transitioned from College of Ag to the university proper – Finance and Administration is what we would call it now. They hired a director for the Motor Pool and, several directors later, here I am.

MD: To think of the technology that has changed over the years.

JF: It is. So in 1937 – we have an inventory sheet – we had twenty-five vehicles, and you would die to have those cars now; '35 Ford Coupe. But what blew me away is the amount of driving they were doing. We've found some mileage logs – they were actually doing as much or more driving in those early decades than we are now, and the only thing I can assume that has changed is the Internet. The amount of primary research that you can do or that is possible has diminished as we've become more lab and indoor based, and so we're not out there as much as we were. And so in some ways, we're smaller now, even though we've managed to grow it a lot since I started, we're probably smaller now than we might have been in 1970.

MD: Spouting some transportation statistics off the top of your head, what role does the Motor Pool serve in the overall OSU mission? Where are we at today? And when somebody looks at this thing ten years down the road, they'll say, "they did that?"

JF: So, we're operating a fleet of, by the end of the calendar year, it'll be just about 460 vehicles. We are the central fleet management for the university, but we aren't the only fleet management. So departments are allowed to own their own vehicles, and they do in large numbers, the College of Ag being probably one of the biggest. That adds an additional, potentially a couple hundred vehicles. We're also eligible, through a USDA program, to receive federal excess vehicles. So these are vehicles no longer needed by the government that they will put on indefinite loan to agriculture research programs. So that gives us another maybe 150. So university-wide, we're operating a very large fleet.

[0:40:29]

Motor Pool-wise, since I've started, we've grown from around 290 to, like I said, around 450. We're doing between 3 and 4 million miles a year of travel. A lot of that – I think over a million miles – is just in twelve-passenger vans. If you were stop by our office any Friday afternoon during fall or spring term, we're sending out in excess of 100 vans to travel and take student organizations up and down the west coast. And that's really, when you want to talk about an environmental victory, when you look at the greenhouse gas per occupant per mile, that is one of the most efficient forms of travel. And

it's also one of the most cost effective. So when you've got a group of grad students that want to go to a conference in San Francisco, they're not all jumping on a plane. They're jumping in a van and driving ten hours. And so that's a lot of what we do.

The rest of the transportation picture is personal mileage reimbursement. That's really the biggest competitor to the Motor Pool, for a variety of reasons. Convenience, the presumption that it's almost an alternate form of income, because of the high rate of reimbursement for personal miles. But that's another 3 million miles a year, university-wide. It dwarfs the use of other car rental services. Everyone assumes that, "oh, you must be terrified to have Enterprise and Hertz in town," and I'm not, because they're a great transportational alternative for some things, but the amount of usage that the university funnels through them is very small compared to just jumping in our own car and hitting the road.

MD: So it's a going concern and now it serves basically the entire state.

JF: Right. And then, the stress or anxiety of having people all over the place at any one time. Because we provide the 24-hour roadside assistance for Motor Pool customers, because we want to support you from beginning to end of your transaction, and sometimes more. I'm the first person that gets the phone call whenever they phone in with whatever their issue is. It could be simple – "I don't know how to return the car." It can be – it was probably my scariest, most difficult call – I had a group, it was a crew team actually from the U of O, they were pulling a trailer – and if you've seen these, these are sixty-foot crew boats – behind one of our trucks. They're broken down in the middle of I-5 in downtown Seattle, and when I get the call, it sounds as if they're dodging cars. And then you work through that situation – Washington Department of Transportation has to temporarily move them, then I have to figure out how to get a group of six people from Seattle back to Eugene. And what do you do with a sixty-foot trailer?

And that can happen anywhere in the country. A flat tire in the middle of the desert and there aren't even roadsides. So it's interesting and challenging to do this. I tell people that, because those calls can happen at any time, and because – you've probably noticed this – I like my customers, they're valuable to me, they're my customers, and I'm going to do whatever I can to take care of them. That can mean jumping in the car and driving an hour or it can mean going in on the weekend. I've done all kinds of things. But we're going to make sure they get taken care of.

MD: That's why you're the guy at the Motor Pool, everybody knows Justin at the Motor Pool. One of the things also that you've been involved with over the years is the OSU Professional Faculty Leadership Association. It's gone under a couple of names under the years, but what does this organization do? And some of their goals and accomplishments?

JF: I participated in PFLA for two or three years, I ended up on their board doing some web updates. But they do a lot of professional development for faculty, so they put on a couple of short two- or three-hour sessions per year on different topics, they have a couple annual events. I'm no longer active with that group, but I was for a number of years.

[0:45:06]

MD: You talked about the sustainability and being still involved with that, what other ancillary organizations are you involved with?

JF: Well, the sustainability thread led me to do a lot of different things that we haven't mentioned. In that time period, like you said, we acknowledged that sustainability was just developing its buzz potential. It was during that time period that I worked with volunteers to set up the event recycling programs that are at a number of big festivals in town. And so we were the first group to offer event recycling at Fall Festival. And from Fall Festival, you get a call from Da Vinci Days – "hey, we'd like to offer some recycling at Da Vinci Days." We did Red, White and Blues at least one year.

But through those participations, I ended up being recruited to be a lead volunteer for Da Vinci Days. So that became something that I did for a number of years. I created the first scale map, on a computer, of the festival, and you're moving tents around. And that leads to, "well, you need to be the guy that's there when we're setting up," and then, "you need to be the guy that's there when we're operating the festival." And I had a lot of fun doing that. It was actually that participation that led me to be a lead volunteer with commencement, doing a lot of the same facilities set-up. So those were fun.

MD: So you make commencement work every year.

JF: I did. I did it for a number of years and decided "I've added my touch to it and now it's time to let someone else have their turn at it."

MD: So in 2012, when Michelle Obama, the First Lady, was here, did that add extra?

JF: It added a lot of extra steps.

MD: Because I didn't get to march from the quad, I marched from the practice facility because of that.

JF: Well and then you learn about the nuances of that type of event. So you have Secret Service that shows up first, and that's a group you work with one way. And then, much closer to the event, you have the White House press group show up. They have very different missions, almost conflicting, in opposite directions. You have the White House press group, whose job it is to publicize and make as public a showing of the First Lady, or I assume it would be true of any other group. Then you have the Secret Service who is there to keep her from the public and safe. So it was interesting to see those dynamics. You ended up reworking some things a few times.

Then you have the Secret Service group that shows up the day of. And so, the Secret Service group that shows up a week early, they're much more give and take, and jovial. And then you have the deadpan face Secret Service agents that are there the day of, that clearly don't have a sense of humor. So that was pretty interesting. I remember, part of stage management was starting and stopping the band, and one of my memories from that day is walking up to where the band was located, near Valley, and so I was up there and I was moving back and forth, because I didn't have line of sight from where the band was to where the individual giving me the cue was located. And I remember suddenly there being a very unfriendly looking state policeman right behind me, "don't move!" [laughs] So he stood with me until I was done and then I went back down to the stage.

MD: One of the things that we always like to do is include your family in this. There's more to these Beaver stories than just your career, there is the family of my Beavers. So tell us about your family – your kids and wife.

JF: Yeah, so I'm married to my wife, Missy Fleming. We were married in 2003. We have two kids – Isaac who is eight, just turned eight, and Madison, who is five. So they've grown up with the Motor Pool, they've grown up on campus, they're very strong Beaver fans. He just had his eighth birthday in December and we had to put up Beaver signs everywhere and get the Beaver cups and the Beaver plates, so they're very strong Beaver Believers.

[0:49:58]

My parents are both deceased. My mom, Janet, attended OSU in the early '70s, so she graduated here with a degree in human resources. My dad, also deceased, went to a couple of different schools. But he was a – kind of an interesting family dynamic – my dad was much older than my mom, and so he'd actually had a family and separated and remarried. He was actually old enough that he enlisted and was in the end of World War II. He was born in '28 and did, like a lot of the kids then, went and lied about his age and tried to get in early, and his mom stopped him. Then he ended up going in anyway. But he was a linguist for the Army Air Corps when it transitioned into the Air Force. I didn't discover until he died, because of the classified nature, that he worked at the Pentagon at some point. And I said to him, shortly before he died, "that would have been really great for show and tell." [laughs]

But his brother was at the invasion of Normandy driving a landing craft. My great grandfather was born in the 1890s at some point, we don't know, I think it was 1898. So with my family, a couple generations spans a long distance. But it was because of my dad's military background and his family's that, at one point, we were looking at West Point and then the ROTC program. I had very good parents; they took good care of us, they just didn't stay around as long as we would have liked.

MD: Your wife, you said she went here. What was her major and what did she do?

JF: She was in Forestry, so she actually did the Natural Resources program in the College of Forestry. She wanted to do interpretive work, so at point, I think just after we were married, she spent a summer over at Cape Perpetua as an interpretive officer and had a great time. When she finished her program, we realized how competitive the employment landscape is in this area for natural resources interpretation, you've got a lot of people from OSU competing for those

jobs. She looked at some options to go back to school, but that was about the time that we were thinking about family and that was the direction we went. She's had a few different jobs on campus, currently taking a break, but she's a transcriber. So she's trained to sit in classrooms with devices so that students who are hard of hearing can have a real-time transcription of what's going on.

MD: Cool. Well, you spoken a little bit about what you do apart from the Motor Pool, but what do you do for enjoyment? Do you have any hobbies or special interests?

JF: Well, I think my family would probably say the Motor Pool is my hobby. And that's been true at different times; we do have a lot of fun at work. I'm a family guy when I'm not at work. So I've got two great kids, I like to take them around, we have a membership to the Oregon Coast Aquarium, we like going over there and touring. We take them to Hatfield Marine Science Center as often as we can. We really like walking the Estuary Trail. We're lucky in where we live in that we're just a mile from one of the entrances to the McDonald Forest, so we spend a lot of time in the forest. I'm trying, as much as possible, to devote all of my extra time on them.

MD: So you basically settled here in Corvallis, once you decided this was going to be your life.

JF: We're pretty settled. We're renting, but we've been in the same house for ten years. I'm four miles, door to door. We adopted some of those rescue alpacas from Linn County, we've got a bunch of chickens. So that's kind of our life.

MD: Gentleman farmer.

JF: Yeah.

Geoff Somnitz: Technology is a hobby too.

JF: Well, technology is a hobby and, I guess, always will be. It changed my career, it changed my path. A few years ago, I got into the Google Glass Explorer program, so that's been a lot of fun. I did, like a lot of the people at the time, I wore it out in time and ended up being an unpaid ambassador for Google as you explain it to everyone. I had to rush out and get the Motorola Smartwatch as soon as it came out because I'd been reading reviews about it for months.

As an archivist and an oral historian, I think you might be able to appreciate the Google Glass wearer's reaction to that technology. The primary feature that I use is the built-in camera, because the little kids are right next to your eye. And I use it to almost photoblog my family's history, because for anyone that looks at pictures, they're just pictures. But when the picture is taken from almost your exact perspective, it's almost like distilling memories. And so when I go back through that album – and this had occurred to me many times with my kids at different ages, you know, when one of them puts their hand in your palm and look at it and you say, "wow, I really want to remember that." That's what Google Glass does for me, because when I'm looking back at those pictures, I can have that, "I really want to remember this" moment. And when I go back and look at that, that's how I remember that. So yeah, that's really changed our family trips. It's fun because it assembles little movies for you and it makes your life look a lot more interesting than it really is, but it's still pretty fun to go back.

[0:56:08]

MD: Well, and like I say, someone watching this interview ten years down the road will say, "boy, that was the good old days."

JF: Right. So yeah, technology – and thanks for pointing that out – has had an impact. I apply it to a lot of problems, but I try to apply it smartly. I think smart processes are more important than IT solutions. I think a lot of the inclination is you find an off-the-shelf software package, for example, and then you adapt your whole business to fit it, because that's the way it was written, and no change orders. And I've gone with a very different approach, and fortunately I've worked with some very talented people along the way.

I had a student, Tristan Wagner, he built the first Earth Week website, as a volunteer. And I laughed because I checked just recently and it's the same Earth Week website that's still being used, almost fifteen years later. But he was one of those phenomenal individuals that I got to work with. I ended up hiring him – he'd work a few hours a week and he taught

himself brand new coding languages, no problem. He built what continued to be some of the most advanced reservation tools software, I think anywhere. And he was just a phenomenal individual. He ended up doing his graduate program in a transportation-related theme, working with ODOT. He was an Industrial and Manufacturing engineer, did a couple of great internships at Intel, and is working for an Intel subsidiary now.

MD: That makes me think that you've seen so many students – because you work closely with them – go through, and you've had an influence just like a professor emeritus would have. Those type of people stand out.

JF: Well, what strikes me after fifteen years is how fast they go. Part of it is, at the Motor Pool, our timeline is a week. So most people measure time in different ways or they react to time in different ways; for a lot of people it's a day, "I just need to get through the day." For us, because the busiest day of the week is always Friday, you're always spending all week gearing up for your big event, and then it's over. Its like, "ok, we made it." And then we have another week. So that breaks your year down into fairly large chunks, so it goes fast. And all of the sudden you realize, "oh wow, it's time for them to put up the poster sale in the red brick mall, because next week, school starts." And you start to recognize all these different events that also help you measure the year. And so they do start going fast, and you appreciate that there are people that have been there as long or longer than you, and you start to feel old. [laughs]

I'm thirty-five and I can feel old because I can remember, wow, like one of the first projects I worked on is a result of the first major construction project that happened while I was on campus. So they built Kelley Engineering. Well, what Geoff won't remember, because he wasn't here, is that Kelley Engineering building is built on top of People's Park. So People's Park was dedicated, I think, as a result of incidents in the '60s or '70s.

MD: Yeah, it was a '74-ish type thing when it started.

[0:59:55]

JF: It was a small green space on the corner of Campus Way and whatever that cross street is across from Bexell, and it was kind of nondescript. And I remember hearing that it was going away, and I took my brand new 2-megapixel digital camera up there, and I took pictures of it. And then, along with Brandon Trelstad and Jack Drexler at the College of Business, we did a couple of projects in Jack's class where students were divided up into teams and they got to – because Kelley Engineering came in and it went away, and some funding was set aside to move it somewhere. So this College of Business class, it was asked a couple of different times to come in with different designs for the space where it is now, across the street from Bexell. And it was a swampy space, and they did a good job. Ultimately, the project that's there now roughly resembles some of the designs, you know, curvy paths. But when you're on campus that long, you do just remember some of those things.

Or, with the renovations that are going on campus now – and I'm sure it's this way in general for campus, when people come back after an extended leave – but they did an extensive renovation of the Memorial Union. And the Memorial Union is a place that I've spent a lot of time over the years, and one of the spaces that I'd spent a lot of time is the board room in the basement, because I'm on the Bookstore board. And so, I'd been in meetings once a month for four years, down in the bottom of the basement. And then the Bookstore relocates, and they do their extensive renovation, and then I have a meeting with the building manager for the MU, and he told me, "meet at" some place. Well fortunately, he intercepted me earlier, because I would not have been able to find my way through that building. It looked so different. So when you walk into a space and you've got twelve, thirteen years of memories about what it should look like, and suddenly it's not. I still walk into the MU and I go up a stairwell and I look at the other one and I say, "you weren't there."

MD: Yeah. Well, when you have 150 years of history at a university, our fifteen year block of that, you have to think in terms of the big picture. Even if your part has changed, just think of somebody that comes back from 1942?

JF: Well, I still consider myself a student of the university because I study it and I watch it. Being at Campus Recycling, it was nice, because when you've got a recycling infrastructure of 4,000 pick-up points across all of the buildings, you get a much better working knowledge of the whole campus. And why I think it's such a tragedy that we have so many individuals that probably come to work as a clock-in, clock-out kind of job; they sit in their cubicle, they might know the people down the hall but not have any idea what's across campus. And so with my staff, I've tried to force them out and at least learn building names, because you have a much different relationship. One of our favorite things to do on the

weekend is, I'll grab the kids and we'd come down and we'll walk around campus and maybe kick the ball at the sports complex that also didn't used to be there.

MD: Well, the OSU campus is really a living breathing entity, and it changes just like anybody else grows up, and you grow up with it.

JF: I like to take people for tours, kind of like the Seattle tour where I think you can go through buildings. So we'll do that and I'll just pick a point, and maybe we'll start in Nash and I say, "ok, let's figure out how we can get to Hallie Ford and we only get to go outside once." And you weave your way through, and then you start to pay attention, and you see names outside doors, and "hey, that's a customer. I didn't know they were in here." Then you cross a couple sky bridges and then maybe go downstairs and see a collection of stuffed birds, and then pop out and poof, there's Hallie Ford. But I think you have to do that, to explore the environment, because you can participate in your different ways, but I think you can participate more meaningfully the more you put yourself in. I feel like the contributions I've been able to make have been bigger because I've been all-in. I've never treated it as a clock-in, clock-out, "this is just my job and I'm going to go home." I don't think I could do a job like that. I think it has to have meaning.

[1:05:05]

No one's ever going to say – we're never going to be in the mission statement, the Motor Pool. And so we have to be providing services that enhance something for people who do matter. It is those researchers bringing in the grant dollars, it is the instructors, it is the post-docs and grad students and undergrads. And that's what we try to do every day.

MD: Well, one of the things that we always do is give you an opportunity, because you have the Beaver Nation at your footsteps here. Are there any words of wisdom that you would like to impart to the Beaver Nation?

JF: Wow. You might have to tease it out of me.

I guess I have some concerns about the future. I am concerned about the cost of higher education; I watch it go up and up. I contributed to it, I passed a student fee. I think that process needs to be checked. Fees are growing. Being on the board of, now the Beaver Store, the costs of academic materials, I can't even related to the cost of a textbook. I remember paying \$100 for a textbook and thinking it was outrageous; I think I might have paid \$140 once for a textbook. To hear stories of students coming back and paying two and three-hundred dollar textbooks, I am concerned about the costs of attendance. I'm pleased that, in my role in the Beaver Store, that the organization is doing what it can to reduce the cost through their member discount.

But I think both the tuition component... I can remember, and this is my fault, but when you go from being a full-time student to a part-time student is that, one of the things that you learn, is that if you don't maintain satisfactory progress – maintaining the traditional trajectory of a four-year student – you lose eligibility. So then you do even dumber things like, "I'll just put it on a credit card." So if I'm doing in the early 2000s at the cost of attendance then, I want to help prevent future students from making those same life choices.

Because I ended up an untraditional student, I hope we can develop a focus on providing services in a greater way to nontraditional students. I remember it being almost impossible to find a class after five o'clock. I did take a number of Business classes in the evening, but they're few and far between. I think we're still figuring out our online presence, and I think we could do a lot more there. So I'm just focused on the future cost of attendance, I think catering to non-traditional students and, of course, there's things happening all over the country now on inclusivity and whether we are or aren't and what we can do better. And I think there are a number of things we can probably do better.

MD: Like I say, we're a developing, living, breathing entity that is continuing to grow.

JF: I hope that we can continue to recruit and retain the all-star faculty that we have. I think we have some great researchers – some greater than others – and I think the ones that can bundle their prowess with humility are great. I can't tell you how fun it is to be talking with a researcher who brings in, in one grant, a million bucks, who does amazing research. And what I like about them so much is that they're excited about what they do. And so you'll end up in a forty-five minute conversation that ends with them coming around the counter so that they can show you on Google Earth where the next research site is. And I think that would be a great way to interview faculty, when you're considering filling

a position, is just, how excited are they about what they do? Because that's that all-in commitment that you need. And I think we've got a lot of great faculty, and I see a lot of great new faculty coming up and filling the spaces.

But we're an old university. Actually, I have a new project in Archives: my wife's great grandfather was a researcher in Crop and Soil Science – it was Agronomy then. He worked with Hyslop and Jackman – Harry Schoth. But this is my next new venture to really see the origins of transportation, because that's the field I'm in now. I found in this correspondence file – he's got over seventy cubic feet of material to go through – a budget that he submitted to Hyslop, which we recognize from Hyslop Farm. So he writes, "Dear George," and then you see George Hyslop come back. And it's, "here's your budget for the 1926-27 year. You've got almost \$1,900 for labor, you've got \$450 for horse hire, and \$50 for sundries." And so then it goes on to clarify in this letter – this is something that I never thought about, I realize that before the automobile we would have been using horses, but I never thought about needing to write horses into a budget. [laughs] But there's actually a paragraph in there that clarifies, "whenever possible, it is the intent of the station" – talking about the Ag Experiment Station – "to use station teams and not hire outside teams."

[1:10:49]

And so then you have to picture – because I had just finally found the motor pool in 1934, so this is less than a decade earlier, when we're budgeting for horses. I've never seen pictures of stables out at the farm, but they must have been there.

MD: There were barns all over this campus, and maybe they just kept the horses there.

JF: Well, and then you start to unravel more of that OSU story. So you see these letters back and forth between Harry Schoth and Hyslop, and the stack for October was like that thick [holds fingers an inch apart], that was one month. And so they were writing on consecutive days. How was that getting back and forth? So there must have been some kind of horse mail carrier that was going back and forth between Hyslop and campus, and these guys were sitting at typewriters, typing page-and-a-half letters. And less than a decade later, we're driving '35 Ford Coupes and driving all over the country.

So if that's the history, I'm hoping to be here to see what the next step is, what the next decade brings. We're hearing about autonomous cars, and all-electric cars, and we're hearing about all sorts of changes to personal transportation. Even the way we think about personal transportation. So you've got Uber and Lyft and all these other services developing, and suddenly people thinking the idea of car ownership is silly, that this is an asset that we spend \$25,000 on and it sits 90% of the time. And so I think it's going to be an interesting decade. I don't know what I'll know in a decade and wish I could tell myself now. Like I said, I wish I could go back and tell myself, in 2005, "wait on the electric car."

And so I think I'm going to be a little less bullish going into the next decade, but I'm excited to see what's coming, because I know it's going to change the world. If, in ten years, you go from budgeting \$450 for a horse team to driving one of Ford's cars, maybe it will be the Google driverless car. We already have semi-autonomous Teslas and other manufacturers.

MD: Yeah, you just get in the car and say, "take me to my research site," and then go to sleep, and they get you there.

JF: Well, and even just to see, in the last ten years – so I remember hearing about 3-D printers, and this is when I'm supporting technology in Business Services. And I remember talking to Printing and Mailing and saying, "I think this could be a big thing." And they were, at that time, if not tens of thousands, a hundred thousand dollars. Now, I bet there's twenty 3-D printers on this floor. We're printing everything from plastics to metals to entire automobiles to people doing TED talks on 3-D printing structures on the moon. That's ten years.

The best analogy that I heard, and I think about this a lot – and I don't remember what they used, if it was beans or it could be Tic Tacs – but you use a checkerboard or a chess board and you put one in the first square and you put two in the second square and you keep doubling it, the way we've been looking at Moore's Law and a lot of the computational stuff. By the time you get to the end of the chess or checkerboard, you've got like an Everest-sized mound of beans, because of that exponential growth. And so they look at where we're at on that timeline, and every square, it's not just incrementally better, it's exponentially better. And that's why I love reading stuff from the Google founder. There are stories about him yelling in meetings, "that's incremental growth, that's not what we're doing. Go back and figure out how to get to that next

exponential step." And I just see that those changes are going to keep coming faster and bigger, so the next ten years, it'll be exciting.

MD: Thinking exponentially rather than incrementally.

JF: Yeah.

MD: Fascinating. Well Justin, you've been a joy. And on behalf of the OSU Sesquicentennial Oral History Project, we thank you for sharing your story as a Beaver and as a manager here, and you're now going to be a permanent part of OSU.

JF: I don't think I'll make it to the 200th, but I'll try. [laughs]

MD: Thank you so much.

JF: Yep.

[1:15:37]