



LaMont Matthews Oral History Interview, July 1, 2015

Title

“A Hometown Company with a Global Reach”

Date

July 1, 2015

Location

Matthews residence, North Albany, Oregon.

Summary

In the interview, Matthews discusses his family background, his upbringing in Dayton, Oregon, his experience of the war years, and his decision to attend Oregon State College and major in engineering. In reflecting specifically on his undergraduate experience, he notes his living arrangements, campus traditions that were prevalent in the early 1950s, his academic progression, and his first contacts with the CH2M engineering firm.

The bulk of the session is devoted to Matthews' memories of a career at CH2M Hill that spanned nearly fifty years. In this, he describes the firm's earliest Corvallis offices as well as the culture of the company at the time of his arrival. He likewise recalls his impressions of and interactions with the founders of the company: Fred Merryfield, Holly Cornell, Burke Hayes, and Jim Howland.

Matthews next provides an outline of his job responsibilities as he advanced within the rapidly growing company, noting his work as an engineer and project manager, and describing his ascent through the managerial ranks. He likewise recalls the changes that he observed as the company expanded, commenting on the relocation of the firm's headquarters from Corvallis to Denver, reflecting on its early use of computers, and describing the broad ownership philosophy that engendered strong feelings of loyalty from CH2M Hill employees.

The interview winds up with Matthews' memories of stepping down from management and ultimately retiring from CH2M Hill. He concludes the session with remarks on his activities in retirement - including his passionate involvement with Court Appointed Special Advocates - notes on family, and an appreciation of his connection to OSU.

Interviewee

LaMont Matthews

Interviewer

Mike Dicianna

Website

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

Transcript

Mike Dicianna: OK, today is July 1st, 2015, and we have the pleasure to capture the life history of LaMont Matthews, OSC class of 1956. We're at LaMont's home in Albany. My name is Mike Dicianna, I'm an oral historian for the OSU Sesquicentennial Oral History Project.

First of all, thanks for participating in this; your story is important to our collection. Let's begin with a brief biographical sketch of your early days, items like where were you born and when, and what did your parents do for a living, that type of thing.

LaMont Matthews: I was born in Ogallala, Nebraska – I'm probably one of the few people who actually knows how to spell Ogallala – in 1934, which was the beginning of the Dust Bowl. My parents were trying to farm – my dad had very little talent for farming – and along with the Dust Bowl, they decided to come west. So we landed in Portland, my dad went to mechanic's school, Adcock Trade School in Portland. And then we moved to Dayton, Oregon, and he took a job there as a mechanic, and that's where we lived all the time I was growing up.

That really shapes a lot of who I am. Very small town, lots to do in terms of in the summer and so on, got my love of the outdoors. I fished and hunted with my dad. Went through all of school there in Dayton, and then when it came time to decide what I was going to do with the rest of my life, I had the great good fortune of having some really good high school teachers, and one particular – Harrison Wilder – suggested that engineering would be a good field for me. He had me in physics and also in chemistry, and so he said, "what am I gonna do?" I know I'm going to college, but what am I going to do. And he said, "engineering, you ought to consider engineering." So I thought, "gee, ok. I'll work on that."

So when I was a senior, people would start to say, "ok, what are you going to do next, LaMont?" And I said, "I'm gonna go to college." "Well, what are you going to take?" And I said, "engineering." And they said, "what kind?" And I said, "whoops, is there more than one kind?" So that's how naïve I was, starting out in this thing.

I was also fortunate to get a football scholarship to what was then OSC, and so that helped immeasurably because it was going to be totally up to me to finance the college education which, at that time, was not nearly as difficult as it is now. I was able to make enough money in the summer to go to school all winter. Tuition was \$165 for my freshman year, total, \$165. And so that, with a few odd jobs and the football scholarship – which only really lasted for a little over a year, about a year and a half, for a couple of reasons. One is I hurt my shoulder pretty badly, the other is, in order to graduate from Engineering, you have to average seventeen hours a term. And I really couldn't afford to play football and take six or seven years to graduate. So it was, let's say, a mutual decision between me and the coach. I was not doing him too much good with a sore shoulder and I really needed to get on with my education, and so it was fun while it lasted but it was time to move on.

[0:05:01]

MD: Knuckle down.

LM: Right.

MD: Well a couple of things about your childhood I was interested in. I love asking people this: do you remember where you were and if you remember hearing about the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7th?

LM: Absolutely. Absolutely. I can tell you – I'm a little emotional about this – but I can tell you the exact spot on Highway 99W that we were at when we heard that over the radio. I was seven years old at the time but we really lived World War II; I mean, it was everybody's war. So my recollection and understanding of World War II is quite in-depth, actually. To answer your question more specifically, we were in the car, we were about three miles south of Dundee, when we heard the news. And it was kind of interesting, because we were headed to Vancouver to visit one of my mother's cousins who was in the Army and, of course, that stopped right there, obviously. But yes, I remember World War II very very well.

MD: So being a child during the war years, did you get involved in scrap iron drives and home front things in the community.

LM: Oh my, yeah, everybody was involved. We cut the bottoms out of cans and mashed them. One of the things that I remember were the ration stamps – the red stamps for meat, the blue stamps for something else, vegetables I guess, I don't know. But yes, and of course we had the blackout drills and did some kind of bizarre things looking back on it. Dayton had a reservoir up on what was called Red Hill, and the local men were recruited to go up there and guard the reservoir from attack. I remember my dad strapping on his .45 pistol and going up there and guarding the reservoir.

And then they built an airplane-spotting tower right by the high school, and all the people did a shift there. You went up this little tower, probably thirty feet above the ground, and sat there and looked for Japanese airplanes. It seems really naïve at this point, but everybody took it very very seriously.

MD: And people who have lived through that, and especially the guys I've talked to that were kids during that time, it was kind of a heady time. And you didn't know whether you would be going out of high school and going to war or not. You were still a little young during the middle of the war years. And so right after the war, you're moving into your high school years. These stories are what I love to capture; it's so important.

Let's talk about Oregon State College. You're a proud Beaver alumni.

LM: Oh yeah.

MD: And you were in Mechanical Engineering. When you entered in fall '52, what were your initial living arrangements? Did you live in the dorms or a fraternity?

LM: No I lived in a co-op; I lived in Hawthorne Manor. And a co-op is just that – the only staff we had was a cook and we called her a "den mother" too, and then we took care of all of the chores, basically. And I think it cost me \$52 a month to live there for room and board, so that was another way to be able to afford to go to school.

MD: During your period of time at OSC, there's traditions that are sadly lacking now. You were a freshman, you were a rook. Did you have the green beanie?

LM: I had the little green beanie and took that pretty seriously. I remember one of the rude shocks I had when I came down to school was the rules were that freshmen could not wear corduroy pants. And I'd worn cords all the way through high school, so that was kind of my wardrobe. And in this day and age you'd say, "you know what you can do with rule?" We took it really seriously, so I had to buy new pairs of pants in order to comply with this no cords rule. Then they had an organization that was made up of sophomores called The Thaners, and they were sort of the enforcers. So when I became a sophomore, I became a Thane – each house had one Thane – so then I got to make sure that no freshman could be seen on campus wearing cords.

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MD: And no fussing at sporting events; you had to attend all sporting events.

LM: That's right, no fussing means no dating.

MD: And no stepping on the grass.

LM: Yeah, we just had a great respect, probably a ridiculous respect, for authority at that time.

MD: And you burned your rook cap at the end of the freshman year in the bonfire?

LM: Oh yeah, sure.

MD: That's why they're so rare in our archival collections, because people were eager to burn them.

LM: Yeah, that's right.

MD: Tell me about your classes and some of your favorite professors in Mechanical Engineering.

LM: Well, let's start with my freshman year, where we took – I don't remember the formal name, but it was basically Introduction to Engineering. And one term was devoted to civil engineering and one term to electrical engineering and one term to mechanical engineering. And I had the great good fortune to have Professor Richardson teach all three terms. When I started school – since by that time I knew that there was more than one type of engineering – I decided I wanted to be an electrical engineer, but we went through that process and when we got to mechanical engineering, I knew that's what I wanted to do. I was convinced even then that if something's easy for you, why not take advantage of it? And it just made sense.

MD: That's something that clicked for you?

LM: Yeah, so that's how I selected my major. A whole host of other instructors that I can recall that had major impact: George Thornburg, who taught thermodynamics and heat transfer, that kind of thing. Art Hughes, who was a power plant specialist, which is what I – you know, you say you major in something, actually we took like nine credit hours of power plant engineering. But it would give you a little bit of a soft landing when you went to work. So Art Hughes. Louis Slegel was the head of the department and really commanded a lot of respect. Let's see, Ole Paasche taught metallurgy and I enjoyed that a lot.

But the one that probably had as much influence on me as anybody was Dick Boubel. Dick taught fuels and lubes, I think he was essentially a grad student at that time, but he was working summers and so forth at CH2M, what was then Cornell, Howell, Hayes and Merryfield, became CH2M, became CH2M Hill. Anyway, when I was a spring term senior, I was busy interviewing firms and focused quite a bit on power plant engineering, that really got me excited. And I shudder to think what my life would have been like had I followed through with this, but I really had the options down to Allis Chalmers and Fairbanks Morse, both of which were based in Cleveland, Ohio. So you can imagine.

MD: Leaving the Northwest for Cleveland?

LM: Yeah. Which was just about five years before it became known as the Rust Belt. Anyway, Dick – I won't say he recruited me for CH2M, but he suggested to me and to CH2M – Jim Howland – that I should go talk to them.

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So I did. They had this office on Western Avenue and I had no idea what they did, all I knew was whatever time of the day or night you would go by, the lights would be on. But that was pretty much all I knew about it. But it sounded interesting and I know it seems a little odd right now, but my reasoning for saying, "yes, I'll go to work for CH2M," was two. One is, the experience looked like it would be really transferrable; when I decided what I really wanted to do, this experience would serve me well. The other one was it was very low risk, all I had to do was move across town. So why not? So I did and forty-five years later I retired.

MD: When you were in college, all male students were required to take at least two years of military drill because of being a Land Grant college. I notice you took Air Force ROTC classes.

LM: Right. That was just to get it out of the way really, it wasn't really any big commitment. I took it for two years; you could go on and take it for the additional two years and when you graduated you would be commissioned as a second lieutenant. I didn't do that, so I had a deferment, basically, for the next two years. At that time, they had something called universal military training, which meant that every eighteen year old male had an obligation to serve in the military. And so when I got out of school, that bill came due, and so that's when I did my active duty; actually in 1958 after I'd worked for a couple years.

MD: Did you attend home football games the year that we first had Benny Beaver on the field, Ken Austin?

LM: I think he was about four years older than I am.

MD: The season he was Benny the Beaver was '53.

LM: OK. I don't recall Benny the Beaver. I recall going to football games certainly, but I don't recall that. I know who Ken Austin is, of course, but I don't really recall that.

MD: Yeah, because he was in the other end of Engineering about the same time. While you were there, I suppose you were tied up with classes, but other activities like dances and clubs? Were you involved at all?

LM: At little bit, but a lot of it was focused around the School of Engineering. We had something called The Engineer's Ball, and there's a funny little story there I'll tell you. But really, I don't suppose I went to the MU more than a dozen times. We'd go down there to get books, but we pretty much were in our little technical bubble up there.

MD: Did you ever go to classes in what was then Apperson Hall?

LM: Well, it was the Mines Building, Graf Hall. Pretty primitive at that end of the campus. Some things in Apperson, depending on what was going on.

MD: As you graduated with the class of '56, you were basically already set up, leaving school, to go work for CH2M. Did you take some time off or did you just get your diploma and show up to work?

LM: I got my diploma on, I think it was a Saturday, and I went to work on Monday. But I had worked for them part-time; I actually went to work for them in March, so I had kind of got up to speed a little bit. But yeah, I had a burning need for money. [laughs]

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MD: So you are employee number thirty in a company that now has 30,000 or maybe a little less than that. That, to me, is mind-boggling. What were some of your initial duties and projects as a young engineer fresh out of school?

LM: Well, I started definitely at the bottom of the mechanical engineering profession. My first jobs were designing plumbing and heating systems for houses. We had, at that time, a small group that did work for architects, and so that was where I got started was designing residential plumbing systems. So that's my basic mechanical engineering.

MD: Yeah, that's basic. The company was already in business for right around a decade at that time, so they were in the office over on Western when you started?

LM: Yes, they had just moved from the downtown over the Penney's store.

MD: Yeah, which was just like a little bitty cubby hole that they paid thirty bucks a month for.

LM: Right, yeah. And they had just started – I think they had just completed the first expansion of that building on Western. They added to it on and on and on; it was kind of like a rabbit warren, it was an interesting office.

MD: What was the culture of the company like in those early days?

LM: It was amazing. It was an experience that – just a privilege to work there. The four partners were some of the finest gentlemen I've ever known – honest as the day is long, believed that we were all in it together – it was very much an employee-emphasized culture. It was a culture that we were professionals and that we, above all, should do quality work, innovative work, and if we did that and had a good reputation, we would make money. And it was profit-driven; we were practical enough to know that's the way it worked. But it was that sequence of events – we are, in every sense of the word, a team. There wasn't really the feeling of the formal hierarchy, although you knew who was boss, there was no question about that. But your focus was to do quality work and satisfy your clients. And we did and we were profitable, we were very profitable.

MD: They had philosophies which, I don't know if the philosophy of those four was any different than other firms or not, but it seems to me in my research that they're kind of special.

LM: Oh my, yes. Oh my, yes – there was no question about it. One of the things that I look back on – you don't grasp all this or get it put together until it's in retrospect – but one of the things that they managed to create was an atmosphere

where the employees were very much a part of everything, and that you knew you were being adequately rewarded. So after I became a manager, I believed very strongly that, in a business like consulting engineering, that you need to view it as a creative business. And that people, if they're bothered or annoyed by policies or feeling unappreciated and so on, if they're chafing, they're not going to be very creative. They may be there in their office with their head down and their pencils going, but if they really don't feel good about the company, their creativity is really affected. During that period – and it continued, it wasn't just early on – there was a lot of innovation; patents that put us head and shoulders above a lot of the competition and so forth. So I just believe that that was one real big factor in our success.

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The other was that there wasn't a huge difference in compensation between the production people and the partners. You read any more about the CEOs of corporations just making obscene money, and certainly they made lots more and they deserved to make lots more, but it wasn't like they were making ten million and we were making ten thousand. And it was pretty well defined, how the compensation program worked. So it really wasn't a class society; I guess that's the way I would put it. The partners were doing projects and there was all kinds of interaction and a high comfort level, firm-wide. It wasn't Mr. Cornell or Mr. Howland, it was a very productive creative atmosphere.

MD: Let's take these iconic alumni of Oregon State one by one. What are some of your memories of, the first person that comes to mind, is Fred Merryfield? What are your impressions of him?

LM: Fred was still active at the college when I went to work, so he was, I guess what I would term him as almost part-time. But he had such a presence that he might have only been there part time, but his presence was there all the time. Fred was a really interesting guy; pretty gruff. He was our first staff manager, so that was one of the first non-technical positions that was created, so he was basically the head of what we would now call the human resources department. But Fred was a story teller; we did a lot of night work in those days – we had deadlines and we had to meet them, so you'd go back to work after dinner – and it was kind of a standing joke, "Fred will tell you about when he designed the railroad between Eugene and Oakridge, and how he won World War I."

MD: Did he talk about being a pilot?

LM: Yeah, he did. So if you went back to work after dinner and Fred was there, you made a project out of avoiding him, because if he got you, you'd spend until midnight listening to stories. And you're just not going to walk out on Fred Merryfield, I'll tell you that. So yeah, that was Fred.

MD: OK, Holly Cornell?

LM: Holly Cornell was the urbane gentleman of the partners. That was why, when it came time to open an office in Seattle, there was only one choice, and that was Holly. Holly was, they would say these days, one really cool guy. And I had the great good fortune to spend quite a bit of time with Holly during those years, because he headed up all of the government work that we did – and we did a lot of work for the Corps of Engineers, some for the Air Force. And so when we had these conferences, Holly would always go to them. So there was a lot of project-related and travel-related time that I got to spend with Holly, and there was a lot to be learned about how to act with complete confidence in a large meeting.

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I can remember one time, early early conference that we had with the Corps of Engineers in Portland – it may have been one of the first that I ever went to. And everybody was talking around the table – I don't know if I've mentioned how unruly a conference of twenty-five engineers can be – and after a while, Holly decided it was time to settle. So Holly leans back, puts his feet up on the table, lights a cigarette, and says, "OK, I think this is what we're going to do." And everybody said, "yeah, I think this is what we're going to do." There are not many people who can get away with that, and I wouldn't recommend it to any aspiring young manager. And it just fit – it wasn't obnoxious, it wasn't rude, it just kind of fit in the whole thing. So that was Holly.

MD: Now, Burke Hayes?

LM: Burke was, I would say, the true Renaissance man. Burke was a brilliant engineer; he actually did several of the inventions, like the Flomatcher, that really built, that was a big part of the foundation of the firm. He was greatly respected in the higher levels of the state of Oregon, everybody knew Burke. And he, again, had an excellent presence. He was also an accomplished piano player, did a lot of quirky little things like he decided – actually it was about the time I went to work there – we didn't have a PA system, because the office had been fairly small. Well, now we're getting a little bigger so we've got to do something because the telephone system all went through the switchboard, so you had to be paged. So Burke devised a system of bongs, bells, and each person was assigned a tone. I mean, like, Holly was one and Howland was two bells and so forth and on down – I was twenty bells or something, I don't know. Anyway, so the switchboard operator had a key – I mean, this whole system was wired up so she could bong people to answer the phone.

MD: Early intercom.

LM: Yeah, early intercom, right. And of course, Burke had dual degrees in mechanical and electrical engineering, so he was off and on my supervisor, so I got to spend a lot of time with him too.

MD: Now, Jim Howland seems like an interesting guy. I read his "Little Yellow Book."

LM: Yeah. I always viewed Jim as the heart and soul of the company; the spiritual leader, if you will. He had a huge sense of professional and personal ethics. He was the one that really carried the banner about quality, treat people – well, Jim was really the managing partner. He used to joke about, he'd worked there for fifty years and never got a promotion, because he was the managing partner and that's what he was. But anyway, as I say, I can't say anything more clearly than I felt he's the spiritual leader of the company.

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MD: I kind of got a sense of that as I read – and that was written in the '80s – but his "Little Yellow Book." Philosophies of management and how to treat people, and you kind of get a sense of him.

LM: Yeah, right.

MD: Do you have a copy of that around still?

LM: Yes, but not right here now. I think it's in my files.

MD: It seems like something that you'd want to keep.

LM: Yeah.

MD: Now later, Clair Hill became part of the organization, which made it CH2M Hill. I understand he was quite a character.

LM: Well, yeah. We did a number of joint projects with Clair, or his organization, but it was primarily, my involvement was on military bases and so forth. Clair really made his mark in the big irrigation projects in central California, as I understand it, but I wasn't real close-

MD: Yeah, because their office was in Redding.

LM: Redding, yeah, that was their main office. It's where they kept all the airplanes too.

MD: Yeah, true. So the company gets bigger and bigger and bigger, so they ended up moving into a new campus, basically. And that was the one that was on Western that kept expanding?

LM: Yeah, right. We were there a long time; I don't remember exactly when we built the building over on Walnut, but it seemed to me like we were on Western the '80s, I believe.

MD: During the '60s, I noticed that the company worked on a huge number of civil engineering projects all around the country – Alaska, Lake Tahoe – building bridges, wastewater plants, huge projects like that. As a mechanical engineer, were you involved with the nuts and bolts of these huge civil engineering operations?

LM: Yeah, actually they're more specifically sanitary engineering applications. There's more than one kind of civil engineering, and these water and wastewater plants were based on treatment systems, many of which actually CH2M developed.

Oh yeah, you couldn't avoid them if you wanted to. But that was really a very interesting part of the projects. After I graduated from designing plumbing systems for houses, I just eventually moved into, rather quickly actually, a lot of mechanical engineering in the wastewater system. I know the first project that I was project manager on was a sewage pump station for the city of Silverton. So that's where I got started. And from there I did a lot of work and was also project manager on a lot of on wastewater projects. Not anything like Tahoe.

MD: Yeah, that was a pretty major-

LM: Right, but we were right in the middle of everything there.

MD: Did you do a lot of travel?

LM: Oh my, yes.

MD: You were on the road a lot?

LM: When I retired, I don't think we bought an airplane ticket for about ten years. I nearly made the million mile mark, just short of it.

MD: And military, municipal – pretty much the whole gamut. I suppose later, as you were farther up, the international projects that came in-

LM: I didn't really get too involved in the international projects. In addition to the municipal work, we got involved in a lot of industrial-type power plants, and that's kind of the direction that I took. Wastewood-fired boilers, steam power plants, the industrial-sized gas turbine plants, things of that sort. That was one of the philosophies that the firm had was, if you had an idea and you wanted to pursue something and you could make it look like it was something that they could add to their portfolio, you had a lot of freedom to do this. And freedom to fail and start all over again. It was a very very supportive atmosphere.

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MD: By the '70s you were really starting to move into the managerial end of it. I found an article in your hometown Dayton newspaper from '78 where it talks about how you became the director of energy and industrial systems.

LM: Yeah, that was when Burke Hayes retired. But before that, it had to be in the early '70s/late '60s – this was after we acquired Clair Hill's operation – we needed some kind of an umbrella organization because by this time we had like a dozen offices. We needed something to make us be assured that we were doing consistent technical work. So Archie Rice developed something called the discipline system, where you had the regional management systems – the regional offices with their managers and then district managers over them and so on. The discipline system was just that; it was based on the various engineering disciplines – mechanical, electrical, civil, sanitary, structural, on and on. And so when they formed that, then I became the first director of mechanical engineering, that's where that got started. And Burke Hayes was the vice-president and director of industrial energy systems, and that turned out to be a real umbrella within the umbrella, in terms of lots of different sub-disciplines there.

MD: So you guys were over the regions and there was kind of a hierarchy?

LM: Well, we called it a matrix organization. We were not over the regions, our responsibility was to look after the technical content of what was being done in the regions. The regional managers were responsible for financial

management and personnel hiring, although we did get involved with a lot of hiring decisions for our particular discipline. And that was basically why I logged so many miles, because eventually we had offices all over the country and I needed to go there from time to time.

MD: The first one that they opened in was in Portland, than in Seattle?

LM: Boise was the first.

MD: Oh, really?

LM: Boise was the first, and I think Seattle was the second, and then Portland. And then about that time is when we merged with Clair Hill, then that's when we said – we, they – said that we needed some kind of an overarching organization to make sure that we were all singing out of the same hymn book.

MD: So by the time that you were working at this level, were you still nuts and bolts with the design?

LM: Yeah, really. More like probably project reviews and occasional project management position, but it evolved more and more into an administrative position – technically based administrative position. It was a dream job. For an engineer you could not ask for anything better than to have a discipline-related management job.

[0:45:03]

MD: Yeah, that does make sense. So it must have been a marvel to see the pace that the company grew and the new projects. I looked at a history that went year-by-year, and it talked that by 1950 or something like that, they'd reached 1,000 projects, and a couple years later, 3,000 projects. The next thing I'm looking at, they're on their 10,000th project. It must have been a whirlwind.

LM: Well, yeah. And this was the amount of creativity, and we all felt like we were working for the best consulting engineering company in the country. We felt like we were doing more innovation. I mean, gee, based in Oregon, we got hired to do a huge wastewater treatment system in Virginia, clear across, based on a treatment process that we had developed that fit their needs, which is they had a huge population base and very small receiving stream. So you needed a very high level of treatment in order to be able to put the effluent in the stream; it almost had to be drinking water quality. And we had developed a process called tertiary treatment that would do this.

MD: And like I say, it was just exponential growth. Now the company decided to move its headquarters to Colorado because it was more centrally located. Did you go there or did you stay here?

LM: No. Well, the reason they moved to Colorado – it made sense, by this time we're a major force in the consulting engineering business and you get tired of trying to answer, "where's Corvallis?" from a transportation standpoint and everything. But the big driver was when Jim Howland stepped down and Harlan Moyer became the new president. And Harlan Moyer did not want to live in Corvallis. It was a company joke, but it was the right thing to do, there's absolutely no question about it.

MD: It's the Denver area.

LM: That's right. And at that time, it was a democracy, and we had the choice whether we could move to Denver or we could stay in Corvallis. It was basically, "do you want to spend a lot of your life on an airplane? You can stay in Corvallis." And there were some personal reasons, family reasons, that would have made it very difficult to move, and so basically I did my whole career in Corvallis.

MD: And you ended up traveling back and forth between offices and spent a lot of time doing your work on an airplane?

LM: Yeah, and at that time, flying coach was better than flying first class now. It was [dog barks], you get tired, but it was really a nice experience to be able to get on the airplane to know that the phone's not going to ring and you had that amount of time that was totally discretionary. You could finish some work, you could catch up on some technical reading

or other kind of reading, whatever you wanted to do. So it's not like it is now; flying is hard work now, no matter which part of the airplane you're in, it's hard work. It wasn't then that way, there was a lot of pleasure to it.

MD: Well, we're moving into the 1990s and almost coming up on the fiftieth anniversary of the company, as they began in '46. So during the '90s you're pretty much at your peak with the organization, is what you would consider?

[0:49:51]

LM: Yeah, I would say this was when Burke Hayes retired, then I became the director of industrial energy systems which, at that time, included – it was almost like a potpourri – we had mechanical, electrical, instrumentation and control, electric transmission, corrosion, mining, and something called industrial systems, which then was the seed that developed Industrial Design Corporation, IDC. So all of that was under this – that's what I meant by a sub-umbrella.

MD: Now I notice that early on, that the company started using CAD engineering software, it seemed fairly early. Were they cutting edge when it came to the Computer Age?

LM: I think there was, yeah, there was a real vision there. I think that the vision kind of outran the technology at that time. Holly Cornell took a leave – he was the manager in the Seattle office at the time – and he took a leave from that for a year to develop a strategy and a process for us to become a computer-based firm. CAD kind of came out of that later, but this was more of a, "how are we going to use this technology?" Which at that time was pretty much in its infancy; you couldn't go up to the store and buy a program to do much of anything, really. And it was, as I recall, at least in my view, computers were primarily – they were not communication devices. It was to develop spreadsheets and databases and stuff like that. So we may have been a little early, but it's better to be early than late with something like that.

MD: And now the entire industry is probably driven-

LM: Oh yeah.

I want to go back to something that occurred back in the early '70s, and that's when CH2M decided that, for one thing, they had a very broad ownership philosophy. And the next wave of partners that they brought in – well, I should say, it's not just the founding four, it was Archie Rice and Ralph Roderick too, so there was six. And then, of course, when Clair Hill came in, he became an equal partner there. But then the next wave of people that were basically ten years my senior, like Bob Adams and Wayne Phillips and Sid Lasswell, they took them in as partners. Now you've got twelve partners. And then the rest of us that were coming up, they said, "we need to retain these people, but we cannot have forty partners, we just can't do that."

So that's when they formed the corporation, so they had everybody – if you qualified as a stockholder – you became part of that. And that was a basis for, well, your ownership compensation, it was just a major major step in distributing the compensation, the income, and also retaining – nobody left CH2M, believe me. They had this philosophy, and we carried it on for a long time, that you carefully hired people because you expected them to retire with you. You just did; that was just the philosophy.

[0:54:52]

So then, now that you have stockholders, you now have a basis for – a much more formal basis and a much more orderly basis – for distributing compensation and bonuses. We went through elaborate ranking processes to – as a matter of fact, when I was on the board that was something that we spent a lot of time doing, was absolutely ranking employees and breaking it into different bonus contributions and stuff. So that was a really big deal in the continuity. We looked around at some of the competitors and there was single ownership; maybe they had themselves and two kids or something like that. So there was no basis there for continuity really.

MD: That's one of the things that I noticed in the website and the newsletters and some of the things that I've looked at, they don't call retirees "retirees," they're "alumni." I like that. You're part of the original family, you're alumni. It does seem like, even with a company that's as huge – 20,000 people – it was voted in *Forbes*, numerous times, as "best place to work," so it seems like this whole idea of a culture and inviting atmosphere expanded the company.

LM: Yeah, I guess. I've been away from it now for almost twenty years, so I've really lost touch of what's going on behind the doors.

MD: The company took on a huge amount of controversial and major projects; I found that they were involved with the Hanford clean-up, beginning in the middle 1990s.

LM: They may still be.

MD: I'm sure that's an on-going thing. You were around when that started?

LM: Oh yeah, absolutely. I didn't have a great deal to do with it, because it was primarily a chemical engineering project, but yeah, it was mammoth. It's almost hard to get your mind around the problems up there.

MD: Yeah, well Hanford and atomic energy is a big part of the collection that we have at the OSU Libraries, and so thought, "oh wow, they're connected with our stuff." Now, the company celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1996, and so you basically, for a large portion of that fifty years, were a part of that organization.

LM: Oh yeah.

MD: Do you have a sense of the history that was involved at that fifty year mark and your place in it?

LM: I think it's been what we've been talking about so far. I felt like, first of all, the greatest place to work in the world. The camaraderie, the opportunity to advance, and the opportunity for a continuing education is just unmatched. I got a huge amount of additional courses and so forth, courtesy of CH2M. So that's my sense. And it's an over-used word, I know, but it really had a family atmosphere at that time. You get further and further away from it and, as we say, it's not a 30,000-member family now by any means, but in the early years – I mean, we'd have a Christmas party and the partners and their wives would cook the turkey. It was that kind of a deal.

MD: A hometown company with a global reach. So you retired, sort of, in 1996, and stayed around for another period of time. Tell us about this whole letting go process.

[0:59:45]

LM: There again, I think I was extremely fortunate, because when people approach retirement, there's two categories: the first – and it's too bad – the first one is people who just can't wait for their last day. And I've known probably too many people that say, "boy, I walk out of here, I'll never look back." And then, there's the other one, which I happen to have the good fortune to belong to, was you enjoyed the work – it was such a rewarding career, enjoyed the people – that it would have been traumatic to have just cut it off. So the opportunity to taper off and do different kinds of work; I had been basically in administration and management for, shoot, at least twenty years before I retired. And so to be able to go back and do technical work – and at that time I focused primarily on different systems of quality control, and my position on some of the projects was primarily quality manager. So yeah, it was a great opportunity to kind of taper off, because I couldn't imagine just saying, one day, "I don't do this anymore."

MD: Graceful exit.

LM: Yeah, right.

MD: So by the middle 2000s then, you were pretty much out of it?

LM: Yeah, I was. I would say by 2000 – well certainly by 2005 and probably a little earlier than that.

MD: So what did you wind up doing with your free time once you had free time?

LM: That's a good question, I'm glad you asked that. I felt like, with my travel schedule and preoccupation with everything I was doing, I really had never had an opportunity to be part of the Corvallis community. So that was one of my objectives when I retired – and this was during the tapering off process – was to get involved in the community. And so I got named to a couple of non-profit boards – I think United Way might have been the first one and the YMCA was

one – and you learn real quick that when that happens, it becomes contagious, because now you're a candidate. Being on a non-profit board is really easy.

MD: Oh yeah, you've got to learn to say "no."

LM: Yeah. And I joined Rotary, and so this got me acquainted with some of the people in the community that I really didn't know; I really was not a part of the community at all, as I said. And then, one day – every week at Rotary you have a speaker and generally it was someone with a connection to the community – and one day our speaker was Kathleen Hutchinson. She was Kathleen Parish then. And she talked about Court Appointed Special Advocates – CASA – the organization that represents kids that have been taken into state care and our placed in foster homes and stuff. And it just really struck a chord with me. I said, "you know, I really would like to do something that puts me closer to the trenches, so to speak, as opposed to just being on a board." And so I got involved with CASA and was deeply involved for about ten years.

There are several things that appealed to me about it; one is that I really enjoyed the courtroom atmosphere. I liked the adversarial activity – it's a lot more fun if you're not the one being sued, other than that. So that's the way I viewed this was I was these kids' attorney, essentially. Because if you look at the system, the state is represented by the district attorney – actually the attorney general, but that gets delegated to the district attorney – and the parents are represented by a court-appointed attorney, so you've got the kids that's out there, kind of the middle. And his or her interests may not coincide with either the state or the parents. You talk to ten different CASA volunteers and you'll get probably ten different viewpoints as to how that ought to run, but that's how I viewed it, is that I was this kid's representative in all these various activities that take place when a kid is in foster care. And so I did it – and I have a tendency to pour heart and soul into whatever I get involved in – and so I did it for ten years and then I retired as a CASA.

[1:05:37]

MD: Retired from CASA, yeah. I've raised money over the years for CASA in Albany, so I'm familiar with the organization. I noticed that you turn up with the Old Mill Center for Children, is that part of CASA?

LM: Well no. I was very active with Old Mill for quite a while, but that had more to do with some personal relationships, particularly with Bev Larson. My late wife was very good friends with Bev and so I got into that. CASA was related because some of the kids I had were receiving counseling at Old Mill Center, so it's all in the same-

MD: Yeah, it's all within the genre.

LM: Right, that's right.

MD: Have you had hobbies over the years or did you not have time?

LM: I never met a hobby I didn't like. [laughs] Yeah. Oh, let's see. Fishing, that's another example of when I get involved with something like that, I'm all in. I started fishing with my dad and then when I went to work for CH2M, quite a number of the guys were fly fishermen – Stewart Brothers and Archie Rice and on and on. And so I took up fly fishing, and then next thing you know I'm building fly rods and tying flies and just fully committed to that. I was playing racquetball for quite a while and loved that. And the softball team at CH2M, that was a lot of fun. I'm still trying to learn to play golf. But yeah, hobbies, oh yeah.

MD: You had a little bit of time for things like that, yeah. One of the things that we always really – because we've learned your life story, but we haven't touched a whole lot on family life.

LM: Yeah, I was about to bring that up.

MD: We're in that area.

LM: Yeah, we're really really tight with the family. We're having the great good fortune of all of the kids live in the Portland area. Our oldest daughter lives in Canby, middle daughter lives in Gresham, and my son lives actually in Portland proper. So we're pretty close, we really are.

MD: Grandkids?

LM: Yeah, we've got six grandkids – oldest one is thirty, youngest one is seven. Great age range.

MD: So are you getting ready to be a great great? Or maybe not?

LM: No hurry for that. [laughs]

MD: Tell me about how you met Della and your life with her. I understand that she was involved with CH2M too.

LM: Yeah, that was always her one-upsmanship, because she was employee number twenty-nine. [laughs] We worked together for many many years, and then I separated from my wife in the early '70s, and we'd been friends, acquaintances, for a long time, and she divorced about the same time. So we just developed and ended up getting married.

MD: You've got the grandkids, you've got the family. You're here now in North Albany, but you originally basically settled in Corvallis and had a house there?

[1:10:02]

LM: Oh yeah. Well, I graduated in '56 and when Della and I were married we bought an acreage out by Crescent Valley High School, and so all the time that the kids were going to high school, they spent a lot of time there at that place. We had three acres there; we had our own septic tank and our own well and all the other things that you really don't want. So one day in '99, I was out there working on the water system, and you know how nice it can be in March with the rain and the wind and stuff. And I came in and I told Della, "we're gonna sell this place; I'm tired of this." And so that's when we sold that place and then bought this place in North Albany.

MD: One of the things that I always like to do, especially with alumni that are Beavers through and through, is to give them a chance to impart some wisdom or give that special message to Beaver Nation, because they are the people that are going to be consuming the final product of our chat. So as a proud Beaver of the class of '56, do you have any extra thoughts?

LM: [laughs] Well, I'm sure enjoying where our athletic programs are going right now. I think we've made some excellent choices in coaches. Probably the high point – well there are several high points; if you talk Beavers, we're talking sports, that's me. We were here, very actively involved, with the basketball program when Ralph Miller was coaching. Those were great years, just an amazing amazing time. And then, of course, when Dee Andros was here and brought the football program from nothing to being really competitive. I think we've done some pretty good things here, I'm looking forward to where we're going to go from there.

MD: Have you been on campus recently to see the differences between when you were there and how it looks today?

LM: Yeah, from time to time. And, of course, it's huge. When I graduated there were 5,400 students on the campus and now I guess there's 22,000 or something.

MD: Yeah, they graduated 6,000 this year.

LM: So it's changed in so many different ways.

MD: But the Beaver is still there, the family is still there. Well, it's been an honor to be able to learn your story and to get some insights into some very very famous Beavers with the CH2M Hill organization, and to have you share your life with our Sesquicentennial Oral History Project. And on behalf of the OSU Libraries, I'd like to thank you for your participation and I've enjoyed every minute of it.

LM: So have I. It's been a real pleasure to go back and revisit some of that stuff and the great personalities of some of the people that I worked with. And also the wonderful experience of having been able to do that.

MD: Great, thanks so much.

LM: And one little aside. I have to give Oregon State a real plug: I was very well prepared to go out into the real world by the academic background that I got at Oregon State. It was a pretty smooth transition and I'll always be grateful.

MD: That's an on-going theme with so many of our alumni, that's the one thing that they can say is that it was OSU, or OSC, that gave them that basis.

LM: And looking at what they're doing now, like the Austin Entrepreneurial combination there in Weatherford Hall, and some of the things that they're doing in the Engineering programs in robotics, it's just amazing amount of progress in the system. I couldn't be more proud.

MD: Well you're part of a long history of Engineering – 125 years in the engineering field at OSU – and you're also, I forgot to mention, a member of the Engineering Hall of Fame from Oregon State.

LM: I'm very proud of that.

MD: You were inducted into that in 2004, wasn't it?

LM: When?

MD: I can't remember when you're-

LM: I don't know, I've got a plaque in there. [laughs] No, I'm very proud of my association with Oregon State.

[1:15:45]