

INTERVIEW WITH GENE BIGGI, 22 OCTOBER 2001

TAPE 2 SIDE A

- 009 Nothing else will grow on land planted with HR
- 015 Original 14 acres included old Beaverton Foods plant & now the Beaverton Round (bankrupt complex at Tri-met station), Cattle Co, Hall St Grill (last two are restaurants), bank, 2 retail buildings; area is called Beaver Creek Village bounded by Hall Street & Cedar Hills Blvd.; Biggis donated land for roads thru some of their small parcels of land
- 030 Gene owns about 28 acres in downtown Beaverton, brother & sister own smaller parcels
- 040 As town center grew around their area, taxes increased; moved some of the farming to Sauvies Island, Jackson Bottom (Hillsboro), Sherwood's Onion Flats
- 050 Built West Gate Shopping Center; mostly leased the land for office buildings (80,000 sq. ft.), gas station, Firestone Bldg. during the 1960s
- 058 Sold 10 acres of land to city, mid 1930s-40s[?] for sewer plant; Beaverton wanted its own sewer plant where the Round is now; this was good farm land & had Biggi's irrigation wells
- 066 Corps of Engineers wanted sewer plant where Tektronics is now but city fathers said NO because that would cost \$3000 more to lay pipe all the way there; Corps warned that sewer would smell in summer
- 074 City condemned Biggi property; paid them \$7000 for 10 acres; Rose Biggi accepted it over protests from children (Rose had become an American citizen & wanted to be a good citizen) but told City, "that ground will never be lucky"
- 092 It was an ugly site, no shrubs, smelly
- 102 This was a setback to company but old country attitude of "never accept defeat" prevailed; they always paid their bills; if Beaverton Foods closed today, Gene could still pay all the bills; bankruptcy is really stealing money from someone else
- 120 The sewer was there for about 20 years; phased out when United Sewer Association was formed
- 125 California had a law stating "if condemned land was not going to be used for original purpose, it had to be offered back to original owner at price they were paid & in original condition"; Washington had similar law; Oregon enacted that law 3 years after land was offered back to Biggis; Biggis gave up the land, City filled it in, land is where the Round was started
- 147 Oregon Electric RR tracks went thru the original 14 acres; Gene's parents bought that land because it was cheap because the RR ran thru it & it was low land

- 152 Their house was right near the tracks & intersection of two lines; train whistles sounded all thru the night
- 164 City Fathers once said to Gene , “Biggis are so lucky, born with a silver spoon in your mouth.”
- 173 Biggis own land where Beaverton Center TRI-MET station is (Lombard Street); had farmed it for many years; eventual plans call for intersection there with train line from Wilsonville
- 183 That site was too small, couldn't get tractors down there easily; so moved farms out & left land fallow for years but paid taxes which were minimal; then area zoned commercial, taxes went up significantly, from \$200-300/year to around \$10,000/year; land was low & increasingly surrounded by paved areas; therefore, it was too wet & was no good for farming
- 204 Beaverton wanted to put culvert under Murray; Beaverton Foods paid City \$38,000 & got permission to fill in the lowland; did so for several years
- 212 Metro bought 5 acres of adjacent land for the bus transit station at Lombard Street just north of TV Highway
- 221 Some environmental people from Seattle checked the site, noted that Biggis had filled in the land; had started doing so 1975-80; some law was passed in 1973 re filling in land
- ???Corps of Engineers said they didn't have the necessary 404 permit to fill???
- 238 Federal govt. said the fill was illegal & permit from city was not good enough, must dig out 5 acres of the filled dirt; lots of stuff in that fill because people dumped tree stumps, plaster board, refrigerators, etc; Police didn't stop the dumping (they had better things to do); Biggis did not put fence around the 10 acres
- 264 Federal agent turned Biggis into Federal govt. for illegal dumping; fined \$25,000/day or \$73,000,000 total making them the highest fined family in US at that time; Biggis hired an attorney although there were no environmental lawyers here then
- 276 Biggis offered Federal govt. \$100,000 to buy about 20 acres near St. Mary's to use that as the drainage area; case lasted about 4 years because govt. kept getting new attorneys on the case; cost Biggis about \$400,000; couldn't put any money into Beaverton foods, thought it might go bankrupt
- 298 Lite-rail (TRI-MET) entered the fray & designed path for the new rail line to go right thru the contested 5 acres; TRI-MET told the feds to settle with Biggis (didn't care how); feds wanted TRI-MET to change location of tracks which would have cost additional millions buying extra land, wiping out apartment complexes); Tri-MET won

- 312 Biggis wanted to be paid back for years of misery; TRI-MET wanted 2.7 acres; Biggis would have sold it for \$100,000; instead got \$1 million to compensate for their fees & losses at Beaverton Foods
- 335 Biggis donated some of remaining 7.3 acres for Lombard Street extension (to Lite-rail station); now has land on both sides of Lombard Street; plans to develop it after new Beaverton Foods plant is up & running; waiting for Beaverton Round to be finished; then wants to put in apartments, athletic club, restaurants, sports bar
- 374 Almost all of Gene's properties are filled; looking at bringing in Crispy Cream Donuts (a national company) into site where Coffee People are now, donut place stays open 24 hours a day
- 398 Beaverton going thru bad times now; lots of vacancies; city has bad zoning laws
- 405 END

TAPE 2 SIDE B

- 001 Beaverton Round won't succeed because people don't want such high density; Gene pays close attention to real estate concerns in Beaverton; was on the Task Force involving planning for Beaverton Round; thought plans were too ambitious; failure of Beaverton Round adversely affects value of Biggi land all around the Round
- 020 Beaverton govt. needs new blood and ideas; Hillsboro is pro-business; Beaverton Foods has 100 employees, many want to move to Hillsboro area; Beaverton only wants housing, not business; Beaverton has lots of vacancies being picked up by Asians and car dealers
- 060 Biggis leased land on Sauvies Island with option to buy; before buying it Biggis decided to get out of farming; difficult to get farm help, too many winos
- 072 Contracted out the farming to others; went to Tule Lake area at suggestion from Dept of Agriculture; lack of water there in summer 2001 could be a future problem; looking into bringing in HR roots from Poland, have received some samples from Poland; one farmer that Biggis deal with has 13 wells in near Tule Lake so he is OK
- 084 Biggis spend more than \$1 million on HR roots in Tule Lake area; going there meant Biggis eliminated owning/maintaining farm equipment, insurance for it, fuel, weed killer, labor etc.; they just provide the roots
- 092 Beaverton Foods gets a truck load of HR roots every 5 days, working on a three year contract;

checks each truckload for good roots, then cuts a check for \$16,000 - \$17,000/truckload; farmer stores roots in a cooler in Klamath Falls

- 100 HR roots are harvested in early spring and late fall; gets good roots from Tule Lake soil; works with three farmers there; shoots from the main root are cut off and planted for next crop; some roots are dehydrated, Beaverton Foods sells them too; uses several million pounds of HR roots each year
- 135 Mustard seed comes from Montana; seeds milled in Conrad, Montana; best seeds come from Montana and the Dakotas; has same arrangement with farmers there as in Tule Lake; needs 3,000 acres to supply Beaverton Foods with mustard seeds, only 500 acres for HR roots
- 150 Kansas tried to get Beaverton Foods to move there; would use 3,500 acres of Kansas land, probably also processing; Oregon doesn't care about farmers, just wants hi-tech;
- 156 Beaverton Foods is first food processing plant built in Oregon in last 5 - 7 years, doesn't encourage food processing plants; additional comments on Oregon land and tax rules
- 192 Gene opted to stay in Oregon because his family is here, it's a convenience instead of having to travel back and forth
- 200 Over last several years has had several offers to buy-out Beaverton Foods; figures the buyer would move operation to mid-west because buyer is an investor and costs are cheaper there; Hillsboro did not offer any monetary incentive to move there
- 227 Beaverton Foods has not purchased any new companies; introduced some new products; competes in two world contests; in the last one Beaverton Foods won 12 out of 36 world-class awards
- 245 Will be developing more food service business - large container sizes for restaurant trade; needs a separate automatic line to process large containers; plans to introduce more dressings, oriental sauces and exotic salsas - all will be shelf-stable
- 263 Requests for speciality foods come from overseas - France, Germany, Belgium, Hong Kong, Singapore
- 270 Terrorism will lead to move interest in US production because products are safer; Oriental label will stay but ingredients will be local and processing done in US
- 318 Beaverton Foods costs are much higher than foreign products; big buyers like Costco won't buy from Beaverton Foods who has to test incoming products and final products; costs Beaverton Foods \$60,000 annually for quality control; has a food testing lab, keeps all records, tests samples

from each batch, puts on safety seals

- 350 Safety and purity of processed foods will become a marketing tool; in the old days company could change a product any time; now even a small change in ingredients requires a new label
- 367 Albertson's has largest selection of Beaverton Foods; must have fast moving items; maybe 20% of total Beaverton Foods products are in big stores; remainder goes into gift packs and tourist traps
- 404 Can WCHS get some photos, particularly shots of the operating activities in old and new place?
- 406 END - then I got a tour of the new facility