

Kiwanis (civic group) Gary Ellsworth
Interviewed by Kenty Truong
May 26th, 2005

The following interview was conducted on behalf of the oral history program of Century High School. The interviewee is Gary Ellsworth, and the interviewer is Kenty Truong. The interview took place at the Hillsboro Police Department on Thursday, May 26th, 2005 at 4:00 P.M.

Kenty Truong: So our research question is to analyze and describe the changes and trends in crime and law enforcement in Hillsboro, Oregon from 1980 to the present. What is your relationship to this question?

Gary Ellsworth: I live in Hillsboro. I am not part any police force, but I am certainly interested in any and all aspects of safety and community protection.

KT: So are you involved in any programs that promote safety and community protection?

GE: The closest thing I come to that is graffiti clean up.

KT: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

GE: I am a member of the Kiwanis club, as you may know, and one of our community projects is that we have a group of people that is requested by the Hillsboro police. We go to various sites to clean up or paint over graffiti.

KT: How often does the Hillsboro Police Department request this of you?

GE: They sponsor this club and it isn't just the Kiwanians that do this; there are several organizations that do this. The Hillsboro Police come to our club. They are certainly invited to come anytime to talk about a variety of things from law enforcement issues to safety helmets for kids to any kids of topics we are working on together for the community.

KT: Are there any other projects the Kiwanians and the Hillsboro Police Department working on?

GE: I know we have partnered with them on the Helmets for Kids. We talked to them about perhaps joining them in a project, and I forget the name, but they go to the high schools and give demonstrations of car accidents. I haven't personally been involved in that project but if I get the opportunity I certainly will.

KT: How often does the graffiti clean up happen?

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III C.2 } GE: Its sort of a task, but it seems that this spring and summer there's been quite a bit more graffiti than in the past in different areas in the city. Its something my particular group does once a month at least. I know there are other teams so it's a growing problem.

KT: What is the particular area?

GE: Well it's certainly predictable. There's 13th street, it's a particular area where you will get some graffiti. Across from the courthouse there's an area where there's graffiti. Down in the southern part of town and southeast 5th. Its also been growing around 25th street.

KT: How long have you lived in Hillsboro?

GE: My wife and I moved here in 1966.

KT: What was the 1980s like in Hillsboro?

GE: 1980s. I have to get a little perspective here (reflects back about crime and law enforcement). Well I guess it's a little hard for me to pinpoint the 80's but it just seems like the early years we were here, we just didn't seem to have the number of problems we have now, but of course the population was much smaller then too, but it does seem we have more gang related incidents now, **MUCH** more drug problems, and of course traffic has grown by leaps and bounds. I think interesting enough, and of course this is my own opinion because I don't have facts to base this on, but my guess is that the number of officers we have and cars on the streets in the city and county per capita of population is probably, we probably have a much smaller per capita per officer in the 80s than now because of the rapid growth in the area and obviously budget cuts.

KT: Do you think the growth has slowed the police force down?

GE: I think they are busier than ever. I just think they are under manned, at least in my perspective.

KT: What are the changes from the 1980s to now?

GE: We have grown so fast. Back in the 80s we were still kind of an isolated little community from Portland and other communities. Now we are kind of linked together. I just think with more people we have more issues. Maybe they are the same issues but just more of them.

KT: I've always lived in a big city. What was it like living in a small community?

GE: In the 60s we were **REALLY** a small community. The Beaverton and Portland folks use to call us "the hicks from Hillsboro." It's more like a small town atmosphere. I grew up in a very small town. It seems like you are closer to your neighbors and everybody watches out for each others. That's the good news. The bad news is that everyone in town

knows your business. With a small town, you don't have as many people and everyone knows each other.

KT: What trends do you see in crimes in our community in the past 25 years in general?

GE: I think the biggest concern, and biggest reviver of change is the drug problem such as meth. It just seems to me that the last 10 years or so the problem has been escalating. From what you read and reports you hear, the meth problem has been driving a tremendous percentage of our local problems. We've actually had members of the sheriff's department and the Hillsboro police come to Kiwanis and talk about identity theft and burglary. You talk back and you talk back and drugs seem to be a huge problem.

KT: Have you been keeping up with the meth problem on the news lately.

GE: You can hardly watch news on TV or read the newspaper without bumping into the meth problem. It seems to be driving a tremendous amount of attention.

KT: In your opinion, why do you think meth has been growing.

GE: well its something I don't know much about. It seems to be easily manufactured and readily available. From what I understand, extremely addictive. Meth is really easy to become addicted too. What I understand is once it has a hold of you its very hard to get back off.

KT: How would describe the relationship between law enforcement and the community of Hillsboro?

GE: I think the Hillsboro Police Department has been doing a really good job; I really do. From my personal experience, whenever I talk to them, they have been very pleasant. They seem to be very professional and they certainly seem dedicated to their job.

KT: Has this changed since 1980 at all?

GE: I'm sure they've always been busy. It seems there's more stuff going on now. Obviously its changed simply from the amount of issues they have to address.

KT: are you aware of the concept of community policing which the Hillsboro Police Department has adopted?

GE: I'm not sure I know the formal definition but I am aware of the concept. I think it's a good way to go and we should all be concerned about helping the safety of our community and can't expect the police to solve all your problems. So yeah I think it's a good program. I think it's a smart way to approach it and I hope the community gets behind them.

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KT: Do you think the neighborhood watch program or the D.A.R.E. program has helped?

GE: yeah I think so. I cant see how any program like this wouldn't help. I don't know any statistics that say the D.A.R.E. program has helped this many programs, or the neighborhood watch program has stopped this many burglaries or rapes or assault. Its kind of back to that small town atmosphere; anytime you watch out for each other your better off.

KT: has your own neighborhood participated in that?

GE: we don't have a formal neighborhood watch but we really watch out for each other. It's basically the same thing.

KT: did this type of program exist back in 1980?

GE: I don't know if there was a formal program. I think the smaller towns, and this is true in larger cities in segments, but I think in the 80s they watched out for each other. They still do. My neighbors know what's going on. If they are going to be gone, neighbors always look out for their homes.

KT: How long have you been in Kiwanis?

GE: About four years. Three years actually. I didn't join until I retired.

KT: What brought you to join Kiwanis?

GE: Actually I had a lot of friends who were in Kiwanis. I had been to Kiwanis meetings. When I retired I was sort of looking for organizations that would allow me to do community service on a structured basis. So I joined Kiwanis and I've been happy ever since.

KT: Has Kiwanis always helped crime prevention in our community since the 1980's?

GE: From what I know about Kiwanis, they are very tuned into community action, kind of community betterment projects. So I think the answer is yes that they have done some kind of project or another, they have always been willing to help the police department in various aiding services or whatever in our community.

KT: Before Kiwanis, where you in any other organizations?

GE: I belonged to the Elks club for a period of time but I never got very active in the community. Simply because I was too focused on my profession and my family at the time. My kids were growing up and I spent a lot of time on baseball, softball and soccer. So I was involved in coaching and those programs but I wasn't not really involved in homeless shelters or police department programs.

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KT: How did the media show crime in 1980 and now?

GE: in the 80s, the written media was more prevalent. I think they always reported crime. I think the biggest difference now is they report crimes throughout the day. Part of that is the improvement in media. The television and internet report things instantaneous as they happen. So I think we hear and see more about it than we use too. We've been bombarded and unfortunately if you watch the evening news, you have to watch an awful lot of news before you hear anything positive. You hear car crashes, murders, rapes, child molestations or whatever and it goes on for a really long time in the news before you hear anything positive. I think that's the biggest difference that we are subjected to a lot more reporting. I don't know if it's good or bad. It's just depressing.

KT: Do you think the negative things distort what Hillsboro is really like?

GE: I don't think it's negative that they are reporting it. I guess its important news. Its just that we hear a lot of crime related incidents. I don't know if they single out Hillsboro more than any other communities, but it seems like they only focus on the bad things that happens certainly and sometimes it takes a long time before we hear about the kids in our schools because there are some really good things that go on in the community too. Sometimes it doesn't seem they get the same coverage.

KT: what does Kiwanis do to reduce crime?

GE: You know were not real active in that. We are active in other programs and I forgot to mention this but there is this program where kids and adults can learn computers and things like that. So we are not doing ride alongs and we are not directly involved with the sheriffs department and police department and things like that, but I think when you do programs where people can get interested in positive things, it benefits the police department.

KT: How important do you think these programs are that keep kids occupied?

GE: It just seems to me that any program like the boys and girls clubs or after school programs, anything that helps kids focus on positive things and not hanging out on the corner, gives them something to occupy their mind or body like soccer or baseball, I think it helps. Kids and certainly adults should be involved.

KT: Since your involved in the community, what makes Hillsboro stick out from any other town?

GE: well I don't know much about other towns. Hillsboro is still a nice community I think. I think you see that with the fair still being here, the Saturday market and Tuesday market and other things that draw people into town. The interaction between the citizens of the community; the baseball programs, soccer programs, the schools – we have a good school program. We seem to be doing good. I find it hard to compare to other communities because they are doing good too.

KT: overall, do you think we have a huge problem with crime at all.

GE: I don't think Hillsboro has a larger problem than any other community, I just think that crime is around. The media has made us more aware of it like child molestation and domestic violence. Those things weren't really covered, you just heard about it. Now there's so visible that they get more reported now.

KT: Was there less child molestation and domestic violence cases in the 80s?

GE: No I don't believe that at all. I believe there's always been domestic violence and to some degree there was always child molestation. I just don't think they are visible. They weren't talk about much.

KT: Were they accepted back then?

GE: I don't think they were accepted. People just didn't come forward with it.

KT: Lately, a growing problem in Hillsboro has been gangs. What are your experiences with gangs?

GE: I don't have much experience with gangs except for the graffiti I clean up. I know they are here certainly. It doesn't seem we have a lot of gangs here yet, but certainly there are gangs here. I truly don't know much about them. They don't seem to be a growing problem.

KT: What is the main difference in the relationship between law enforcement and crime in 1980 and now?

GE: I really truly think the biggest variable is the drugs. That is my perception. The biggest driving difference, and I don't mean drugs didn't exist in the 80s, but I think that's the biggest difference.

KT: Thank you very much for this interview. Before we end, is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to mention?

III C 8 { GE: Well the traffic. I don't think it's a crime issue, but as we get more and more people, traffic is a real issue. Homeland security. I think Homeland security has done a good job. Since 9/11 we have tried to improve our national security. You know it's been a long time since our homeland was attacked and I think we need to concentrate on that. We are losing that vigilance.

KT: Thank you very much.