

Oral History Interview
With
David Celestin

Date: Saturday, January 7, 2012
Interviewer: Robert David Breton
Location: Mission Viejo Library
Mission Viejo, California

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David Celestin

January 7, 2012

Robert David Breton,
interviewer

BRETON: Good morning, Dave.

CELESTIN: Good morning, Bob.

BRETON: Today is Saturday, January 7, 2012, and I, Robert David Breton, am interviewing David Celestin, former Executive Vice President in Charge of Planning for the Mission Viejo Company [Vice President of Planning and Governmental Relations], at the studios of MVTV [Mission Viejo Television] inside the Mission Viejo Library as part of the Oral History Project.

Where were you born and raised?

CELESTIN: Bob, I was born in Galveston, Texas. However, my family moved to California when I was four years old, so I was raised in Los Angeles.

BRETON: Where were you educated?

CELESTIN: In Los Angeles, Catholic school, Catholic high school, Cathedral High School, and after high school, I went in the Marine Corps and, fortunately, got married right away. When I got out of the Marine Corps, then took me about ten years to get my degree because I had children and I was working and going to night school.

BRETON: Where did you get your degree?

CELESTIN: I got my degree from Cal State Los Angeles [California State University, Los Angeles].

BRETON: In what?

CELESTIN: It started out as architecture, then changed to civil engineering, which I really love. I met a teacher who convinced me that I'd be better off if—not better off, but how can explain it? I was working for the City of West Covina at the time and I was writing a lot of reports. She taught me how to really write a report, because I was too long-winded, and convinced me I should stay in public administration. So my degree is in public administration.

BRETON: What was your employment before Mission Viejo Company?

CELESTIN: After I got out of the Marine Corps, I worked part-time jobs at night, raising children. I worked for the Hauserman Company, which was a movable partition company, as a draftsman, and designed offices, office space, for major buildings in Irvine, of all places.

The opportunity came along where there was an opening at West Covina, City of West Covina, but it was for a planning technician. So I applied for the job to test, and they told me it would be about two weeks before they would know. They were interviewing other people. I said, “Well, we’re going on vacation, and I will be back, but please let me know.”

I got back. Well, they'd given the job to another person because I wasn't available, but they said, “We do have an opening in the engineering department.”

I said, “I'll take it.” I had two children at the time, and a raise was great, and I went to work for the City of West Covina as a engineering technician.

Within two years, there was an opening in the building department for a plan check engineer, so I was able to get that job and did plan check engineering, system building director, for the City of West Covina till about 1967, '68. There was an opening at City of Duarte for a chief building inspector, planning director, so I applied. I knew nothing about planning. I'd had two units of beginning planning. I applied, and one of the questions was, “What do you know about planning? What do you think about our city?”

I said, “Well, to be honest with you, driving up and down your city, you really have nothing here. The streets should be landscaped. You should have medians in the streets. You should be planting trees around.” I was just sort of guessing off top of my head, and I got the job.

So the job was more chief building inspector than planning. There wasn’t much development going on. However, we began to develop. The city began to develop, and the one thing I found that was really important was to find out what the people wanted, so I would go through neighborhoods talking to various people, finding out what they thought of the City of Duarte and getting their impressions and telling them about the projects that were being brought to the city. So when we got to the [City of Duarte] Planning Commission, we had no opposition to the projects. Well, we had some, obviously, but most the people, because they had been involved with the decision making and knowing what the project was all about, were very glad to see the projects come. That was Planning Commission and City Council.

Then the city manager went to the City of San Dimas. I was then acting city manager. Six months after he went to the City of San Dimas, he had fired the planning director, called me, asked me if I was interested, and I said, “Gee, [Robert L.] Bob [Poff], I got a chance to be city manager.”

He said, “Well, I really need you, Dave.”

So I went over and looked around. I said, “Yeah, this is great,” bigger city, different environment totally. Duarte’s in West San Gabriel Valley and San Dimas is in East San Gabriel Valley, and different land contours, different environment.

Eventually that grew into community development director. I worked very well with the community again. There’s a small street in San Dimas, the main street, and it was established

way back in 1850. Some developer went out there, thought he could make huge profits by developing land. Well, that fell all apart. Railroad got there slowly. Well, downtown was really like a Western town. So we got together, a member of the City Council, a member of the Planning Commission, myself, and the community, and we decided, well, it was originally thought of as a Western community, it looks like a Western community. Why don't we redo downtown? I said, "We can't tear down downtown. I don't mean that. Just do the facades."

So the background I had from the early stages of architecture in civil engineering and then the brief stint as planning director for two years, went over to Cal Poly [California State Polytechnic University, Pomona] and talked to their architectural students. There was one fellow that really hit me, so we hired him for \$500, and he did renderings of downtown, how it would look, redoing the facades, wooden sidewalks, the whole thing. I forget the name of the project we called it, but we wrote a book, and it went over fantastically.

I got a call one day from a fellow says, "This is George Putnam." Well, the only George Putnam I knew was the guy on TV. Well, no, he was the city planning director of Cypress. Sent him over the book. He said, "This is great." That's the last I ever heard of him.

The opportunity then came five years later with the City of Cerritos. I was Director of Environmental Affairs and Assistant [Director of] Redevelopment. We didn't really know much about redevelopment, except we had a lot of empty land, it was underutilized, and today they couldn't do what we did then. We went through and took all of the undeveloped land and said it was underutilized, and we had a lot of opposition, but we were able to convince the community that the landowners themselves were going to be better off if we went under redevelopment because then their land would become more available for sale, and the profits they would get would be much more than if they sat around and waited. We had to have sheriff escorts going in

the meetings and what have you. But eventually we pulled it off, and it was, I think, one of the better redevelopment programs that went on. They have a beautiful—well, first they developed the auto sales along the freeway, then the mall [Los Cerritos Center] at Cerritos, and then the Art Center and the theaters, and it just became a really beautiful city.

It was about the time, also, that Mammoth decision came down on environmental impact reports. We decided, since it was sort of cloudy, no one really had firm rules about what an environmental impact report was all about, when a developer came in, we sat down with them, we talked about his project, we said, “This is how we see it. This is how you see it. How are we going to work it together?” Our philosophy was, how can we help you do what you want to do that we want to do? So how do we get there? So by the time the developer came in, his project at least had our approval, and we had to go to Planning Commission and then the City Council. The environmental impact report was done first. We went through it before we set meetings, got it all set up, thirty days, and in thirty days he was in and out, he had approvals, and it worked really well. At the last meeting of a project for S & S Construction, this fellow came up to me, and his name was—hang on a minute.

[interruption]

CELESTIN: So this fellow I’d been working with was George Putnam, and he was then working for Shapell Industries [Inc.]. At a break in the City Council meeting, we were outside talking. He said, “Have you ever thought of going on the private side?” He had a very deep voice.

I said, “George, I wouldn’t work for Nathan Shapell for all the money in the world. I’ve heard about him walking up and down the table, throwing a shoe at people.”

He said, “Ho, ho, ho. We wouldn’t hire you anyway. But a friend of mine, [Paul] Van Stevens, is in Mission Viejo.”

I said, “I have no idea where Mission Viejo is.”

He says, “Well, it’s in South [Orange] County, and they’re looking for a planner. So can I give them your name?”

I said, “Yes.”

He said, “Give them a call.”

So I called, and the first interview was with Van Stevens, and it went over pretty well, I thought.

Then I went back, didn’t hear anything. Two weeks later, I get a call. It’s Van, and I’m going to meet with Van Stevens and [James G.] Jim Toepfer, and found out that Van Stevens had been planning director for the City of Santa Ana. Jim Toepfer had been planning director for the City of Santa Ana. [Philip J.] Phil Reilly, who I had not met, had been, I believe, was a planning commissioner for the City of Santa Ana. At least he was an attorney involved with the City of Santa Ana. I never met Phil in the beginning. So that went over well.

The third interview, though, was with Jeff Lauder, who was the senior vice president, and Jeff sat on his side of the desk and I sat on the other, and asked me several questions. At the end he said, “You think you can handle this? Do you think you can work with the Orange County Planning Commission? Do you think you can work with the [Orange County] Board of Supervisors?”

I looked at him, and I guess I was a little exhausted from the interview because of questions he was asking were really going nowhere. I said, “Mr. Lauder, I’ve been in city government now for almost twenty years. I’ve worked with all kinds of people. I’ve worked

with Planning Commissions, City Councils, Boards of Supervisors for Los Angeles County, and upset people. I know how to work with people. I know that I am not the voice. They are the voice. They have things they want done. Your company has things we want done. We can mesh them together. Thank you for the interview,” and I left. I figured, “Okay, that’s it.” I’m happy in Cerritos. I don’t have to do anything.

Well, two weeks later, again I get another call, and that was a final interview with Van Stevens and [Thomas C.] Tom Blum. A week later I got the call that I had the job, and I was hired as manager, planning manager, for Mission Viejo Company. That’s how it started with Mission Viejo Company.

Jack [G.] Raub was an outside engineer, and he had a young man named John Petke. John Petke had been a helicopter fighter pilot in Vietnam. He was a Marine. I was a former Marine. Never a former Marine, always a Marine, I know. But we got along real well. So I would go with John to the various meetings because I wanted to see how he went with the staff, how he meshed with the Planning Commission, and how he meshed with the Board of Supervisors, if necessary. John had one style. I had a different style.

In fact, the one meeting I went to Planning Commission I found out that a very good friend of mine from West Covina who had been a planning director, [Richard G.] Dick Munsell, was arguing against the project, had recommended denial. John made his presentation, and the Planning Commission chairman at the time, Shirley Grindle, looked at Dick Munsell and said, “You know, if your presentation had been as good as Mr. Petke’s, maybe we would have denied it, but Mr. Petke convinced us that Mission Viejo should have this project.

I thought, “Oh, boy, and I’ve got to work with Dick.” Dick Munsell knew me, and he looked at me, and I thought, “This is it. I’m going to have one hard time.”

So after the meeting, I went in, I sat down with Dick, and I said, “Dick, I’m not John Petke. I’m a totally different person. John’s got personality. He’s doing this job for the company. He’s doing a good job. But I’m going to eventually be doing this.”

So he said, “Okay.”

What I began to do then was go to Planning Commission meetings and Board of Supervisors just to watch them and get to know them. Then I got to meet them individually. [Thomas F.] Tom Riley, of course, was a general. Turned out he was my I.G. [Inspector General] when I was in boot camp, and we hit it off pretty well. But I got to meet each one individually and get to talk to them, know them, and watch them and try to understand them, and then watch the dynamic of how they might change when it came to the mixing of the five of them at a meeting, how they may tell me one thing that was the way they felt, but then the influence of the other four could change that dynamic, and I had to understand that.

So probably two months later, I began doing the presentations, and the one thing we did before I even got to presentations, Planning Commissions, was to know the staff. We had to know the staff. The company was great because they were all former city employees. They all understood the dynamic of being on that side of the counter and what we were trying to do. Again, it was what do you want that we want that we can help each other get?

So we had a tremendous relationship with staff. We would not go over their heads. If we disagreed with staff, we tried to work it out, and if we had to eventually go to the Board of Supervisors or we had to go up to the Director of Environmental Affairs, they went with us. We never went behind their back. We had a tremendous working relationship with staff because we had been former public employees.

We hired Wayne [E.] Peterson, who was from County of Orange, and so we had another intro to the staff. We understood the staff. We knew the staff members. We knew their directors. We knew the head of the environmental department. We knew the county engineers. We knew the surveyors. We knew the traffic guys. We worked with all of them, and by the time we got to the Planning Commission, there was really no argument. And if I met with the commissioners before, it was never to talk about the project; it was to talk about them, what they were doing, where they were going, how did we relate with them. I never once, I believe, argued that, “The staff isn’t going to do this, and this is what we’re going to do,” because we worked it with staff. It was a tremendous relationship.

At that time, fortunately before Shirley Grindle made some changes in meeting laws, we were able to go to lunch. We were able to sit down with Planning Commissions, with Boards of Supervisors, with staff, or go to lunch with them or go to events with them. Shirley felt that not just we, not just Mission Viejo Company, but all developers or all people going to make presentations before, had more influence. I sat with Shirley—I liked Shirley—and I said, “Shirley, we have no more access than any other person. All they have to do is call, and they can meet with any of the board members. They can do to any staff member. They can talk to them about projects.”

“Well, we don’t have the time.”

I said, “Well, that’s our job. That’s what we have to do. We have to show what we are doing is for the benefit of the county, and, more importantly to us, what’s for benefit of Mission Viejo Company, what we are trying to do. We are trying to create a sense of place where people can live, they can work, they can have fun, and we can grow a community from hillsides. We can build parks for people to be in. We can build shopping centers for people to shop. We can

build everything people need and have them be there. We're building a community of people. It's a sense of place where we want to be. I live there. I love it. I convinced my wife, after two years of driving back and forth from Covina, that this is where we were going to live, and it was only because I brought my three sons out here and they saw the beach and they saw the high schools and they saw the colleges that we were able to convince her to move."

I reported to Van Stevens, directly to Van Stevens, through Van Stevens, never really reported to Jim Toepfer because at that time we were buying [Mission Viejo] Colorado, and Jim was going to go Colorado. We were also buying the community of—well, the ranch where Aliso Viejo [California] was going to be. I was hired with the thought of having that as my primary responsibility, but that took us three years to get, and I got more involved with Mission. But I reported directly to Van Stevens, through Van Stevens to [James G.] Jim Gilleran, and ultimately Phil Reilly, very little impact with Phil Reilly because everything was going right, if something went wrong.

But we always met before a project. Whatever we were going to do, the entire staff was there. So we had Phil's input. We had Gilleran's input. We had Jeff Lauder's input. We had the engineers' input. We had the planning input. It was really good because we all could sit in a room and we could all posture what we thought was where we should be going. It was never, "No, we're not going to do that." It was, "Why are you thinking that way?" And then we came to some kind of a mesh.

BRETON: So it was important to interface with all of the top executive staff?

CELESTIN: To interface with the entire staff. The leading staff of Mission Viejo Company, was very important because, otherwise, I'm going to go off on a tangent that might be the wrong tangent. I may see something and want to go that way, but I had to understand what the

company wanted, what was driving Phil, Jim, and staff to what we were trying to make, what we were trying to not make, but what we were trying to accomplish, and our goal was a community. So before every Planning Commission meeting, before every Board of Supervisors meetings, which weren't that many because we got Planning Commission approval generally, always we would sit there and we'd talk about the project.

We had what we called the good tree, bad tree. Okay, you're up here, Dave. Now, you're going along and you're getting "yes" answers. What happens when you get "no"? Where are you going to go? How are you going to take that "no" and make it a "yes"? So we all worked it out how we'd go from "no" to "yes." Again, okay, why the "no"? What is it that staff wants that says, "No," to our project?

So again, sit down with staff, understand where they're coming from, and work it out, work it out, because we weren't going to go anywhere if we didn't have staff who understood what we were doing, we didn't have planning commissioners who understood what we were doing, we didn't have the Board of Supervisors. Also, more importantly, we didn't have a MAC [Municipal Advisory Council] to understand what we were doing, and we didn't have the community. If we didn't have them, we didn't have a project.

Only one project in all my years that the MAC said no was a project which we called My Home. At that time it was when the county had the affordable housing projects going on where you had to build so many houses or so many units for people earning less than 10 percent, less than 15 percent, and less than 25 percent. We had created this project, beautiful project, and we called it My Home. All through the meeting [unclear] until the very end, and one of the MAC members said, "What is My Home?"

I said, "It's moderate income."

“Well, what is moderate income?”

I said, “Well, there’s obligation by the County of Orange that you have to provide housing for people.”

They said, “Well, who’s going to move into those?”

Sort of stunned me for a minute, and I said, “Well, your daughters and sons, your teachers, your policemen, your firemen, your young executives. Anybody can move into them.”

They said, “Well, no, we don’t want that. They’ve got to earn their way into the community as we did.”

I thought for a minute, and I said, “Fine.”

So we went and we talked with the county, because the county was really pushing us to begin developing affordable housing, and we said, “We’re getting tremendous opposition from the MAC.” I said, “We are not going to come up here, the Planning Commission, and have the MAC fight us and we fight them. It’s not good for the community.”

So we turned it into an apartment project, which went through great, and it’s one of the best, I thought, projects we did, besides the first one we did, at Alicia [Parkway] and Jeronimo [Road]. It’s a beautiful project. By doing that, we came back with a project across Alicia, and I think it was about 650 homes, sailed right through, no mention of moderate income. It met the county standards and it sailed right through.

I remember the first project we had, apartment project, which is at Via Floreecer, I think that street, and Marguerite [Parkway]. People came out of the woodwork because all these apartments coming in, and it was their children were going to be hurt; this was going to happen; vagrants were going to move in. We worked and worked and worked, finally got the MAC to approve it. It was a beautiful project. Went to Planning Commission. We had some of the same

arguments, and Planning Commission looked at these people and they said, “That isn’t who moves into those projects. Your children are not going to be kidnapped.” We had worked with the staff and the Planning Commission. We had their approval. So we got the project approved, and it went over well.

BRETON: Did the difficulties that you had with the Florecer apartment complex prompt Jim Gilleran to make any amendments to what was going to be multifamily housing right here where the library and City Hall are? This was designated for high density.

CELESTIN: The opposition we had from the people had the company thinking, “How do we convince the people that this is the kind of project that’s needed? We can’t just have all single-family housing on large lots. We need housing that fits all people.” We met with the people again. It was us meeting with the people, and the people coming in to us and listening to them, and then saying, “Well, this is what we’re building. Here’s what the developer wants to do.”

We had a developer come in, sit down and say, “This is what we’re doing. These are the kinds of apartments we’re building. We’re not building little 80-square-foot units; we’re building big units, and one- and two- and three-bedroom units. This is the kind of housing that’s needed for the different population that’s going to eventually move in here.”

We convinced the people that way by, again, meeting with people and understanding why they were arguing against it and then understanding why we were doing it, what the developer was trying to accomplish. We never hid anything from the people.

BRETON: I’d like to get back to the company climate. First of all, was it expected that you reside here, or was it anticipated or required that you reside in Mission Viejo?

CELESTIN: There was no requirement that I move into Mission Viejo. When they hired me, they knew I lived in the City of Covina, I had raised my children in San Gabriel Valley, and knew where I had worked. No, there was never a requirement that I live here. No, simply not.

BRETON: Can you describe the degree to which there was complete delegation of authority versus micromanagement within the company?

CELESTIN: There was never any micromanagement in the company because it was all laid out. We all talked about projects before. We understood the engineering, the environmental, and the planning aspects. We knew what was needed. We understood the land, how the land was going to provide for people in various aspects of everyday living.

To be honest with you, the word was whatever you say at the commission and agree to at the Board of Supervisors, we will do, but if it isn't what we had all discussed before, you're out of here. So I never felt threatened, though, because we always sat together and talked about projects, as I mentioned, the good tree, bad tree thing. What is the Planning Commission thinking on this? How's the Board of Supervisors going to react to this? Frankly, we never had to go to the Board of Supervisors, very seldom, very seldom. I did more with the Board of Supervisors for the Aliso Viejo project than I ever did with the Mission Viejo project, different project totally.

BRETON: Would you describe the atmosphere as intense or relaxed?

CELESTIN: Oh, very relaxed, I think. Of course there were intense times when we were talking about reclaimed water, how we were one of the first to do reclaimed water, and sat with the engineers. "What are you going to do with this stuff, people? Where are you going to use this water?" We showed that you could actually go to the end of the process, sit there and drink the water, which we never did, of course.

There were intense moments, yes, when either I didn't report quite right or Gilleran didn't understand. I never had an intense moment with Phil Reilly. Never. Gilleran was more involved with us than Phil was. Phil was up here, but Phil knew everything that was going on, and Phil was in 99 percent of the meetings, particularly when we were going to do the mall [Mission Viejo Mall], how we were going to get there before [Donald L.] Don Bren and the Irvine Company got to their project there. No, I wouldn't say, no, because everyone knew each other. They knew what their role was with the company. I knew what Phil, Gilleran, Lauder, Toepfer, not much of Toepfer because he had gone, but I knew what their view was of a community, and I think it was tremendous that we all came from the public side. We all understood the public side. We had all worked in the public arena and understood the process. We all knew the planning laws. We all knew the environmental laws. We knew the engineering. We knew what we needed to know to work with staff.

BRETON: Was it an exciting place to work? Was it fun?

CELESTIN: Oh, it was tremendously exciting fun. It was fun. Yes, it was very fun because of the collegial atmosphere of the company, and you were able to say, Phil, Jim, not Mr. Reilly, not Mr. Gilleran. It was Phil, Jim, "Dave, why isn't this done?"

Phil would come in and ask me, he said, "I want to put up signs directing people to the lake [Lake Mission Viejo]. How long is it going to take you to get it approved?"

I said, "We don't need approval."

He says, "Yes, we do, for everything we do."

I said, "No, the PC tax provides that we can put directional signs up, and we can put wherever we want, where we want them, and the staff isn't going to say anything." So we did that.

BRETON: Did you consider this to be an adventure with a high purpose? What was the lofty vision that you felt when you came to the Mission Viejo Company?

CELESTIN: The vision of Mission Viejo Company was to create an atmosphere and an environment and a place. It was a vision that this is where we want to live. We want to be part of this community. This is our home also. We're not some distant developer coming in and then going away. We are responsible. When we were building homes, if there was a problem in the home two years, three years, we went in and fixed it. If there was any problem in the community that we were involved in, we met with the people.

One thing that really helped with the community was the Activities Committee. [Mark] "Ziggy" Wilczynski, just fantastic individual who was so involved with the community that we had the Activities Committee. We were members of the Activities Committee. We were homeowners here. We got ourselves involved in the Activities Committee. We had the St. Patrick's Day Parade. We had all kinds of programs that were fun for people, involved the children.

BRETON: Okay, let's move on to the formation of the company and its partners. Did you ever meet members of the O'Neill family, [Anthony R.] Tony Moiso, Donald Bren, the George A. Fuller Company?

CELESTIN: I never met the George Fuller. I never had the opportunity to meet with Mr. Bren as a company member. I met him many years later, and I knew who he was. But, no, I was not involved in the original—I had no idea what Mission Viejo was when I was being asked to come down and be interviewed. Nothing.

BRETON: Did you feel that the company was actually blazing a trail or establishing a new template for master-planned communities that could be followed or emulated in other parts of the country?

CELESTIN: When I was interviewed by Mission Viejo Company and sitting with Van Stevens so many times, Tom Blum from the Ranch was also involved, and Tony Moiso, the vision that they put out there, we had read about it when I was a city planner. Reston, Virginia, was maybe one of the first ones to even talk about a planned community. No one really knew, I don't think, at that time what it was.

As a city planner, we had a project here, we had a project there. We knew what our master plan was. When we needed to make changes to our general plan, we had many meetings with the people to see how the city was going to grow. In a way, we were doing it, but on a totally different scale, because it was somebody here, somebody there, and what we were going to do. We knew where the parks were going to be.

But when I met with Van Stevens and looked at the plans that they had, I knew this was where I wanted to be. It was what a planner dreams of. It really is.

BRETON: What were the divisions of the company?

CELESTIN: Divisions of the company. Well, we had Phil Reilly as the top guy. Then Jim Gilleran was responsible for the development of the community, but Jim Gilleran was also the finance person that came in from Philip Morris [USA, Inc.], because I guess at that time Philip Morris was considering buying the company, and Jim Gilleran came in more as an auditor to see what the company was doing and eventually convinced Philip Morris to buy the company. Then Jim became responsible for its financial success.

As I said, Jim Toepfer was planning director. Then they hired Van Stevens, who was a planning director. Their goal was to hire people who understood community, what community was about, what it really meant. It wasn't just drawings on a piece of paper. It wasn't somebody's wishful thinking. It was a combined thinking of what are we trying to do, and Phil's vision was what led this thing, this whole development.

BRETON: In what way was it important for the success of this entire enterprise that there be a single developer, that there be a single company that monitored and implemented the plan all the way from start to finish? Another way of asking this, would it have been possible if the Mission Viejo Company had just left and sold off the parcels to others, would the entire master plan have worked without a single developer?

CELESTIN: The development of Mission Viejo as a community would have been as fragmented as the rest of South [Orange] County south of Santa Ana if it had not been the vision of a company to take ground and create a town. Yes, we eventually, after I think it was the '80 recession, we had approvals to develop. Well, the recession stopped the building because people couldn't buy, they couldn't afford it, the interest rates were high. So we rode that out, and we decided that it was not necessarily time to get out of building, because we still kept, but we decided there were a lot of developers, builders, out there who needed land. We always got the approvals. We always put the improvements in. We sold lots ready to go. We did that once we got out of the building because it actually became more profitable for the company to develop the land, and made sure that that plan, that vision, was carried out. If we had walked away, I think it would have been a miasma of I don't know what. It would not have turned into this community. It would have been segregated. It would have been divided.

The lake was an adventure that helped bring more cohesion to the community because it became a central place for people to meet, have fun, relax, enjoy. Thank to Jack Raub, that lake became a huge success, because the state [of California] was not going to let us do it. Jack and Van had gone up to the state, and the State Agricultural Commission said, “We don’t think so. That’s great grazing land. You’ve got to think of the environment.”

So they took a break. Jack sat down—the story I heard, this is lore—sat down and went through and determined the value of the cows eating grass to the value of the fish and water and the opportunity for people, and that’s what swayed it. Jack Raub, a tremendous engineer, eventually became part of the company. We just absorbed him into the company.

BRETON: How important do you think it was to the residents that they know that Mission Viejo would stand behind its plan and eventually build the lake and construct all of the amenities that were part of the master plan?

CELESTIN: The people of the community had tremendous confidence in the company to keep its promise because it was a promise, and they knew that through the MAC, through opportunities at the Planning Commission, Boards of Supervisors, that they had a voice, that the company just did not go off and bypass the community and make a deal with the Planning Commission or the Board of Supervisors that “We’re going to go ahead with this project.” No. The people were knowledgeable. They knew and they understood.

We never had, other than at My Home project and the Via Floreecer apartments, we never had community opposition. They were involved, which was great, because you can’t create a community without people. Yes, you can have a developer come in here and a developer come in there, but it just doesn’t work, not when you have a vision. That vision has to involve people,

has to involve their thoughts, what they want, how they see the community growing. Is this where they want their children to grow up? Yes, it is.

BRETON: I'm going to skip over the land acquisition section and go to the land preservation. Describe your feelings about this land itself and its connection to the Rancho [Mission Viejo] and whether you feel that the Mission Viejo Company actually had a stewardship over the land in trying to assure the O'Neills that the land would be protected from what they saw as the advancing urban sprawl and scarring of the land.

CELESTIN: Not knowing the process that Phil Reilly and Bren and Toepfer and the Fuller Company had in meeting with the ranch [Rancho Mission Viejo], not knowing that history, but reading about it, talking to Phil, talking to Jim Toepfer, there was an understanding with the ranch because Tony Moiso, as a grandnephew of the O'Neills, was involved also peripherally. Tom Blum was involved, always in meetings with us. They understood what the ranch was. They understand the history of the ranch. They understood how it came about, because every home that we sold had the deed all the way back to the ranch days, so people understood.

We had the brand of the ranch as our logo also, and the people helped carry that heritage through. In fact, the ranch had to be so impressed with what we did, because they sold us the northern portion of Mission Viejo and allowed us—or not allowed us, but had the confidence that if we sell it to them, we know it's going to happen. We know it's going to be developed as we would like to develop. We were the model for [Rancho] Santa Margarita. We were the model, and that carried on all the way through the whole development of Santa Margarita and the ranch.

BRETON: In preserving the environment and maintaining the Rancho character of this land by maintaining some of the ridgelines, creating lots of open space, the arroyos left the way they

were, did there come a time when profitability factors outweighed the environmental factors, and how did you deal with that?

CELESTIN: The company obviously was profit oriented. We had to report to Philip Morris. However, that never was the issue. The issue was to complete the vision, to continue the vision, was to preserve a lot of land in its natural state. We were not going to destroy ridgelines. We were going to blend into the land. It's very important that you take land into consideration when you're planning, because, yes, you could go and you could bulldoze everything. That was never our thought. It was how does our project fit the land? How do we help embellish the land? How do we make the land part of the community, let people know that, gee, there's a place I can go for a great walk? The creek beds are still here. We've got trees, oak trees, that are still here. We've got land that the company respects. You have to respect the land, or the land is of no value to you anymore.

BRETON: Is one of the unique characters of the City of Mission Viejo, as opposed to some of the surrounding communities, its hilly nature, the fact that these hills were preserved?

CELESTIN: Yes. Yes, I think it was very important to preserve the nature of the land, and that carried on into the Aliso Viejo project. But it was very important to preserve the nature of the land because the land blends to the community, which makes it a community.

BRETON: Didn't that increase greatly the cost of constructing the homes when you had to terrace so many hills?

CELESTIN: Yes. It was an important consideration. In forming the land or forming our plans to work with the land, what was the cost of grading? But if you contoured your grading, if you made your grading work—we moved a lot of dirt. We moved a tremendous lot of dirt, but if you look at the community, you'd never know it. It looks like that's the way it was. You've still got

contours in this community. You've got streets that go up. I mean, look at the race that they have for the Olympic bicyclists. It was tremendous because we had preserved the nature of the ground in such a way that it's not a flat piece of ground. It is not a flat piece of ground. It is a beautiful piece of ground. Ground was important to us.

BRETON: Could you go ahead and expand on the water reclamation program as an energy-saving project?

CELESTIN: I'm trying to remember the young man who made the presentations for Jack [G.] Raub Company on how this was going to work. I believe the project was nine million gallons a day, but we had to understand what was the purpose of it. Why are we doing this? Well, we had so many hillsides, that would have been very expensive to maintain that with water. So the reclaimed water, which the plan was to build a pumping station and then pump the water all the way up past Lake Mission Viejo to the Upper Oso Reservoir and create that reservoir so that it became a fishing mecca. We had bass tournaments up there. But then that water was able to be piped back into the slopes, into the parks, non-drinkable, but it was nutrient water that was able to keep the plants and the landscaping flourishing. It was a tremendous project.

BRETON: Save on fertilizer as well.

CELESTIN: Yes, oh, yes, yes, because we kept the nutrients in the water, and even though you could to the end and drink it, which I didn't once—I didn't want to do it, but they said, "You've got to do it."

So we did it, and I said, "Oh, it tastes just like water." It was water. [laughs]

BRETON: We're going to skip past the master plan process because that was principally done by those that preceded you before you arrived, but let's move on to utilities. Who was it that was

able to work on the establishment of the water districts, and why are there four different water districts serving this community?

CELESTIN: That I don't know, Bob. I can't answer that question. That's for Toepfer.

BRETON: Do you know anything about the formation of the sewer district?

CELESTIN: No. That was before me.

BRETON: Then let's move to electricity. That was before you, but was there ever an effort to consolidate water districts or utility districts or the electric companies?

CELESTIN: Not that I'm aware of, no. See, that was all pre-me.

BRETON: Before you arrived.

CELESTIN: Yes.

BRETON: Did you arrive after the conscious decision had been made to put all cables underground?

CELESTIN: Yes, but we were doing that in cities, too, so I understood that.

BRETON: Let's move to public safety. Did the company actively pursue—the [Orange County Sheriff's] substation was over in Laguna Niguel, wasn't even here. Did the company pursue and request more patrols of their construction sites or of the neighborhoods or of the parks? Did it have to do that in order to assure the residents that they would be safe?

CELESTIN: Public safety was part of the planning. Again, the creation of community involves public safety. It involves water, electricity. You can't just take housing and say that's a community. You've got to take the entire environment, which includes public safety. It includes water preservation. It includes electrical underground.

Mission Viejo Company wanted to create a community that people enjoyed. It's much nicer to drive up a street and not see a bunch of wires overhead, but you see these mission bell

lightings, and all the undergrounding of the utilities, the fact that the water reclamation was maintaining all the slopes, that they could be assured that the sheriff department, that the fire stations were here, that they didn't have to wait thirty minutes for someone or forty minutes for someone to come out of Santa Ana or Tustin to respond to their needs.

BRETON: So to a certain extent, the vision of the Mission Viejo Company was to create a self-contained community, one that would serve all of the needs of the residents.

CELESTIN: Yes, yes. That's the very definition of community, is that your needs are here. Yes, when they first started, yes, they had to drive to Tustin, they had to drive out of the community to get the services they need. But the vision of the company was to bring those services back into this community. So, yes, there's going to be needs outside the community. We understood that. But as much as we could provide for the everyday needs, the shopping centers, the schools, everything a person needs is right here.

BRETON: Let's talk about medical. To what extent did having a hospital here figure into the plan?

CELESTIN: That I don't think I'm going to answer because I think that's better left for Toepfer. I mean, I could give you an answer, but I think it's better for them, yes, because they were the original visionaries.

BRETON: Let's move to governmental approvals, because you've touched on that already. How many times was the planned community text [Mission Viejo Planned Community Development Plan] amended? How many general plan amendments were there? Were there several? Was it kept to a minimum? Why was the [Mission Viejo Planned Community Development Plan] Feature Plan [section] created in 1977? Was that a requirement of the county that you set forth all of your parks that you intend to build to meet the ratio of acres-per-thousand

population, or was a PC [Planned Community text] text amended simply because it was a changing economy, changing needs, a change in the uses, land zoning uses?

CELESTIN: The planned community text was amended from time to time, not incrementally, but to respond to the completion of the vision. There were changes necessary as we went along. Again, I wasn't involved in the original putting together of the PC text, but it was based, again, because you had planners involved, public planners, who knew what a city master plan was about, who understood planning needs, and as the community grew and the community evolved, there were changes and tweaks necessary that would respond to the growth of the community.

It was never anything that, gee, suddenly we've got to put a park over here, or suddenly we've got this governmental dictate coming down. We were not reactive; we were proactive. It is very important to be proactive. That's what kept the community cohesive, because we weren't changing willy-nilly to, "Gee, some developer won't buy our land because this isn't there." It was, "They will buy our land because they know that they become part of a community and they've got the company backing them. They are responsible to the company. They are not going to get away with creating something that the community doesn't want." Because as I stated earlier, I think, every project, whether it was private or a developer, went through us first. We did the land. We said, "If you want to buy here, this is what we've got. This is what is offered," and it works.

BRETON: So you would do the rough grading, and then you would guarantee to them governmental approvals before they purchased the land, or was there a contingency that if you buy the land and they make significant changes that increase the cost, we can renegotiate the price, or that this is contingent upon governmental approval of your project?

CELESTIN: Developers bought land from Mission Viejo Company that was all approved. We designed the land. S & S [Construction] would come in and want to buy a piece of project from us. They told us what they wanted to build, and we said, “Well, this is the land we have to offer. Because this is our community, we are going to get the approvals. We are going to grade the land. We are going to get the utilities in. You then come in and put the sticks on the ground. We’ve got everything approved. We’ve got all the approvals. There’ll be no changes unless they go through us and we get the changes.”

BRETON: You mentioned that you were attending the meetings of the Orange County Board of Supervisors to observe them and that you were meeting with them personally and getting to know them. At that time, did the supervisor over the Fifth Supervisorial District have sway and more influence than the other supervisors, and was his or her decision respected by the other supervisors to such an extent that whatever he said would be approved by the board with regard to local development decisions?

CELESTIN: The Board of Supervisors, there were five, five districts. Each supervisor was responsible for the development of his district. If there were impacts to the other districts, generally what the supervisor of that district was agreed to the development process, the rest of the board generally went along, unless there was an overreaching problem that might spill over into another district.

We had Tom Reilly at first, and then they split the district off, and [Ralph A.] Diedrich was the supervisor. Generally what each supervisor said was okay, was okay, but what was important to those supervisors is that if we had to go to the supervisors for approval, that we met with each supervisor and we explained the project to each supervisor so they understood what was going to happen in the Fifth District or the Third District or the Second District or whatever,

and they were agreeable. Now, if they had issues, they talked it among themselves and worked it out.

BRETON: I'd like to wind up this session addressing community relations, which you already discussed. It seems like the company shattered all convention by not treating agencies and school districts and contractors and governmental entities as impediments to the process or as obstacles that get in the way of achieving their goals and mission, but by treating them as cooperative partners in a joint venture, and that they did not consider them to be hurdles. Therefore, how did that affect the way in which the company achieved its goals?

CELESTIN: As we transitioned from a home builder to a land developer after the recessions, as I stated earlier, we got all the approvals. We knew what was going to be on the ground. We knew all the conditions, and when a buyer came in, he understood these are the approvals. If there were amendments necessary to fit a particular project, we would get the approvals. We would sit down with the MAC. We would sit down with the staff at the county. We would say, "We need to tweak the plan this way. In order to create the development we're trying to continue to develop, to create our dream, make it come true, we need these modifications," and we'd have to go through the whole process all over again. The developer, when he came in, came in knowing the land was graded, the approvals were there. "All I've got to do is put up sticks and sell it."

BRETON: How did it help the school districts, for instance, or the utility districts to know in advance all of the projected housing that would be developed in the next year or two through your preview meetings with them?

CELESTIN: The utilities, the school districts, all other outside agencies were involved, to a degree, in our thinking. We frequently met with superintendents, with the various directors of

agencies that we had to deal with. So they knew we were going to build 20,000 houses. That was it. Originally, we were going to build ten. Then we bought the adjacent land north of us, and we were going to build another ten. They knew the sequence. They understood the timing of our projects. They were one of the groups we met with.

Besides the county and the MAC and the people, we met with the school districts, we met with the utility companies so they could plan for their needs, and even when we went through the periods of recession—and we went through three of them—they understood things were going to slow down. They could take a little breath. We explained to them why we were getting out of the homebuilding business and we were going to develop the land. They felt comfortable with that because we were doing it, and they knew the projections. They knew the process of our development. They knew when we were going to the county for approvals, because they were also involved. They knew if there was, “Okay, you’re going to build how many houses where? Gee, that creates a need for more,” if it was a park district, more parks. Or, “We need a school over here.” Okay, we set the land aside. This land is going to be for the school district. These are the water needs we have, water district. Plan your extension of utilities. So they were always kept abreast also.

BRETON: Did that help them in preparing to order their materials or their supplies and not have backorders?

CELESTIN: It helped the water districts, sewer districts, school districts, every district necessary for the development of this community to plan ahead and be ready for development, and they could proceed based on the process of our development. As the homes were being built or before they were being built, they knew that there were going to be five hundred homes in this one tract or there were going to be three hundred homes in this tract. What are the needs for

that? How do we project for that? We worked very closely with school districts, both districts. We had probably the best relations of any developer, I believe, at the time with the process, with the people who were necessary, with the institutions that were necessary to continue.

BRETON: How did you cultivate those relations? You mentioned social events. The political climate, the rules have changed now, but did the company have a budget to take these gatekeepers and decision makers to the ballet or on fishing trips or concerts or the Rose Parade [Tournament of Roses Parade]?

CELESTIN: The company at that time was, as every company was, as every other builder was, yes, would entertain. We had fishing trips that would go out of San Diego, overnight, down to Mexico. We had tickets to Rose Parades, to the Rose Bowl game. I took planning commissioners, I took staff, I took supervisors to concerts, to performances. If someone was going to go on a cruise, we made sure that, "Gee, this guy really likes this kind of candy. Let's get that candy in his stateroom," or, "Let's put a bunch of flowers in for his wife."

I don't think it ever came into play that, because we did that, that assured us approval. We did that because it was a way to maintain relationship, purely. That's it. As I stated much earlier, I would go to lunch with a staff member, a planning commissioner, a supervisor. I'd go for drinks after with the MAC members. But it was relationship. It was them knowing me, me knowing them, understanding, and through that process, they knew that what we said was it. We weren't going to change. This is how it was going to work.

Now, their influence or their comment about it, we'd make changes, sure, but we knew that unless they understood who we were, what the project was about, could they rely on me? What I said at a meeting, was that really going to happen? And if I didn't have that understanding, if I didn't know a MAC member, if I didn't know a planning commissioner, if I

didn't know a staff member, and I didn't know who they were, they didn't know who I was, well, there might have been some hesitation. But because we took time to have them understand what we were doing and us understand why they were doing what they were doing, that it meshed. That was the only way it was going to work. If you don't have the trust of people, if you don't have the understanding of the people, it's not going to go anywhere. You really have to involve yourself with the community, which we did.

A lot of times I announced I don't know how many parades on St. Patrick's Day, and I tried like heck to pronounce the Irish words and I always fumbled them. We did commercials, in a way, where Tom Blum's wife now—I can't remember her name, but she was like my wife, and I was a husband going out to work, talking about, "Well, what are you going to be doing in that piece of ground over there, honey?"

"Well, gee, you know, I met with them and they said this is what's going to happen, so I think we can be at ease."

"Are you sure?"

We talked just like we were married, and the one guy thought we were, that used to film some of these things. I said, "No. I've got a wife, three kids. She's going to marry Tom Blum."

But we had great relationships. I mean, we had fun. I think that was endemic throughout the entire company, was fun. Yes, we were serious. We were dead serious, but we had fun. There were tensions at time. I got in trouble at time, but we worked it out. But the atmosphere of the company was, "We trust you," the staff, among the staff.

When we hired Wayne Peterson and others, they again came out of the public side, and they knew [that if] they screwed up, we were gone. Company would do it, like I said much earlier, but we were gone. The company would fulfill what we said we were going to do. But I

don't think we ever screwed up. I don't think we ever did. Yeah, I got chewed out a couple of times. I mean, everybody gets chewed out by their boss, and not necessarily over approval stuff, but just a misunderstanding on my part of what it was and understanding Jim Gilleran. Phil Reilly, I never had anything. Van Stevens was great to work for, absolutely great to work for.

Gilleran and I, we'd go to luncheons together. We'd go to major meetings together. When it came time for developing the Foothill Transportation Corridor and the circulation plan, it was me. I was a face of the company, and yes, Jim Gilleran would show up at major fundraising events and things like that, but *I* was the face of the company. Yes, they knew who the others were, but they knew I was a guy representing the company, and, gee, if he's the guy, they had tremendous confidence in him, and that helped. That helped a lot because they knew the integrity of Phil Reilly and they knew what the ranch wanted too.

CELESTIN: One thing we haven't talked about, Bob, is some of the things the company did or had me do to improve, if you will, my persona a little bit. One was to send me to a negotiation session at Harvard [University]. It was a whole week of just intense work, intense—what's the right word? Intense study, I guess, where we'd sit across the table. I thought I was pretty good from the years I had had, but they would take you and say, "Okay, now go to the balcony and look down, see yourself, see him, see what he's trying to do, see what you're trying to do." Again, it was how do we get to where we want to go, but they spent a lot of money on stuff like that.

Another time they sent me so that if I had to make a presentation, I didn't have to stand there like this and read it. I spent a week in New York just being able to, "Yes, that's the way it went because that's the way we were working it," just sort of like you were maybe taking a

breath or just looking down for a second. Those were the kinds of things the company did to improve us also.

BRETON: So the company was concerned about strategies for achieving a win-win during the negotiations, convincing the other side that they would win with the project.

CELESTIN: Yes. Exactly, exactly.

BRETON: How important was it for the company to establish controls and restrictions through CC&Rs [Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions] as it developed?

CELESTIN: The company maintained control over architecture, style, design, because that was necessary to keep implementing the community theme, so that every community not necessarily blended totally, but you could see a transition and it continued the theme throughout the community. Without control of architecture, this would have been a different community. It would have been maybe a mishmash of different designs and what have you. Yes, we allowed leeway, but they sat down with us and they showed us what, and we said, “Make this change, make that change.”

Like the mall [Mission Viejo Mall]. The mall came in, and they had this fancy design. Phil Reilly’s sitting in a meeting, and he said, “No”, just” no.”

“Well, what do you mean “no”?”

“Well, this is a mission-style community. You will have tile roofs. You will have stucco color in this shade. This has to blend into the community. It’s not going to be a bunch of tall buildings that look, ‘Oh, jeez, now I’m someplace else.’ You know you’re in Mission Viejo.”

BRETON: Is that something similar to what happened with Kentucky Fried Chicken or McDonald’s?

CELESTIN: Exactly. Exactly. No one built in this community unless they complied with the architectural standards of this community.

BRETON: Why was it important for the company to have CC&Rs in place so that the houses would be maintained, landscaped and maintained, and there would be controls set in place that would prevent deterioration and downgrading of the lifestyle and the community, the neighborhoods?

CELESTIN: Without standards for maintenance, without upkeep of property, a community begins to differentiate and not maintain a style, a vision of what the original Phil Reilly and Jim Toepfer and Tony Moiso and the ranch envisioned in selling the land to the company. Not to knock any city, but if you drive through any city, you don't see the continuum; you see areas that get downgraded for one reason or another. But in Mission, because of the community control, because of Homeowner Associations, you have that continued maintenance of what was originally there, and it helps that if you're going to remodel, your Community Association has to say, "Okay."

You just don't go say, "Okay, I'm going to tear down my house. I'm going to build this palace."

Right next door to the house we lived in, they're totally remodeling the house. I come over here and walk my dog on the Oso Creek Trail, a beautiful trail, and you can see the maintenance or the maintaining of the style. I mean, it's a new home, but it's going to look like it's always been there. Yes, you can upgrade your property, but it's going to be upgraded to these standards.

BRETON: How were the Associations instrumental in maintaining the common areas?

CELESTIN: The Associations were sort of invisible, if you will. They never knocked on your door and said this, but there was a standard. Your neighbors were part of the Association. Members of the company were part of that Association because we lived here, and we knew what was expected of us as a homebuyer, and we passed that on through our neighborhoods, and it was great.

I mean, that's how people became involved in the community. It wasn't you moved into or someone moved into a Mallorca and I lived in a Castille, oh, we're a different neighborhood, then you do what you want. No. We all got together because of the master Community Association, because of the parades, because of the high schools, because our children were involved, and we were involved in the sports.

Our children became very involved in the Rose Parade. It was a great thing when the high school—when we did our first Rose Parade float. The whole high school, Mission Viejo High School, got involved, Capo Valley High School [Capistrano Valley High School] got involved, Saddleback [Saddleback Valley Unified School District] got involved, and it was really great because you had the districts, you had the Associations, you had the people very involved and very proud to be working on it. I mean, people used to fight to get in line to put petals on a Rose Parade float, and the fact that we won first time out and we continued to win for the next five years was fantastic compliment to the community. It really was.

BRETON: Let's skip over the landscaping element, which had already been pretty much established when you arrived, and also the churches and schools. With regard to schools, how did the company assist the school districts in demographic studies or population forecasts? Was there a synergistic effect and a constant adjustment between your housing forecast, your absorption rate, and the schools' demographic studies and their population projections?

CELESTIN: Yes, there was synergism between the districts, school districts, utility districts, and the company. We were very involved with the two superintendents and with the principals of high schools. We just didn't go off, as I've said before, and get approvals. We involved the district. I met a lot of times with Peter [A.] Hartman, with [Peter M.] Thorson, and they knew, okay, the company is going to do this when. We project we're going to get this approval and we're going to be building at this rate. We sold it to this developer. He's going to be building at that rate. So with our information, how do you continue to go about your planning? We worked with the districts on planning.

BRETON: Were you somewhat disappointed that you couldn't achieve a consolidation of school districts?

CELESTIN: That was before me. No, because we knew we had two districts, we had two superintendents. We did a CSD District to help Capo Valley [Capistrano Unified School District] and building schools and providing the facilities they needed, and that was just before I left. We had worked same thing with Capo Valley at Aliso Viejo.

BRETON: Did that also involved portables?

CELESTIN: Yes. As far as I know, we never provided the portables, but maybe Toepfer would say, yes, we did. I just wasn't that involved with the districts.

BRETON: Let's go to parks and recreation. To what extent did the company want to portray itself or project the image of being a recreation-oriented community, and how did that impact the marketing and planning?

CELESTIN: I think providing for all the needs, the expected needs of residents was very important to the community. Marguerite Rec Center [Marguerite Recreation Center] was one of the first, and the other rec centers, the dive team, the swimming team, the facilities available to

tennis courts, were very important for people's recreation because recreation is part of a community also.

You have the whole loaf of bread. You don't take a slice here and a slice there. You take the whole loaf of bread, and it becomes a loaf because of the meshing of all needs, to make sure that, yes, there was a place for the children to play ball; yes, there was a place to go swimming; yes, there was a rec center where you could go work out; yes, there was tennis courts where you could go play; soccer fields for the kids when soccer started becoming a phenomenon; baseball fields; football fields; make sure Saddleback [Community] College had a place; make sure that Capo Valley had a high school football field, and Saddleback had the same thing. That's a formation of a community, is taking the disparate parts and bringing them into cohesive thing that makes it one, and that's what Mission is. It's a one.

BRETON: Were these very important in attracting families?

CELESTIN: Oh, yes, extremely important. If you don't provide for the entire family development, you're not going to have a community. You've got to have activities for the involvement of the entire family, the fathers, the sons, the daughters, the mothers, the sisters and brothers, the parades, the Rose Parade floats, the parades down the street with the high school bands playing. It brought the community together. It gave, again, another purpose for having a community, because the entire community was involved.

Activities Committee was fantastic. It was absolutely fantastic. We had more fun with that and involving people and bringing them to the events. It was fun. The Olympics. What other community has had the bicycle race or any Olympic event? Who has a world-class diver in this community with [Gregory E.] Greg Louganis and a coach like they had, and the swim team

that we had and the events that we had for tennis tournaments? I mean, no other community has that.

BRETON: When you look at the overall map in the planned community text, you see that there are more than forty neighborhood parks, all within walking distance of the homes. Was that important to establish a neighborhood?

CELESTIN: Establishing a neighborhood, you have to have opportunities for living close by. You have to be able to get there by a bicycle or walking. It's not driving from here to there to there. Yes, there are places in the community you have to drive through to get through, but that's what makes this community so vibrant, because you see people out running, you see people walking, particularly around the lake. It's fantastic. On my way here today, I wanted to go back up to Olympiad [Road], and so I turned left on Marguerite, and here comes a ton of bicycle riders. I said, "I know where they're going," and I came back down, and, sure enough, they were going up La Paz [Road] to get on Olympiad and do the route, and it was fun. It was fun to see that activity still going on.

BRETON: Amazing. Well, why did the company make the conscious decision, deliberate decision, to place schools and neighborhood parks adjacent to each other, and how did that benefit the neighborhood and the residents as well as the company?

CELESTIN: The placement of parks and schools was an effort between the company, the districts, the needs of people. You're not going to move into a community if your son's going to have to go three miles away, five miles away, and how's he going to get there, or your daughter's going to have to go. You want these facilities readily accessible, and again, that's part of community. It's allowing the people to stay in one area without fear of having to go out

and drive on a freeway to go to school. Everything's right here. Everything. You can go from kindergarten through Saddleback College and Fullerton classes, and it's great. It's great.

BRETON: Was there an anticipation that there could be joint use of neighborhood park with the adjacent elementary school?

CELESTIN: Oh, yes, yes. In fact, a lot of the parks are adjacent to the schools, so that the kids, they come home, then they've got to go three miles over here to play. We made sure in our planning that—I hate to repeat myself, but it became one. We wanted this community to be one, and that's what it is. It is one community.

They say Reston is the first planned community. Reston doesn't look anything like Mission Viejo, and yet you read not that much about the planned community effort in California and the real first planned community, which was Mission Viejo. You really don't.

BRETON: Let's move a little bit into the stables, the riding stables. Where were they when you came here? Because they had been transplanted three or four times.

CELESTIN: I think first riding stable I saw wasn't so much a stable as it was the land set aside adjacent to Mission Viejo High School for the high school student to understand where this land came from, and that was in working with the O'Neills also. In fact, they brought the first cows in and the first horses in in that area, and it was to make sure that people understood the history of this land and wanted to maintain the history of this land. It's very important to understand that we came out of an area that was once underwater, and having a whale bone there at La Paz and Chrisanta [Drive], and letting people see, look, this is the archeological history of this community, and it's going to be maintained.

BRETON: Now I'd like to move into a completely different area, which is development of commercial areas and residential. What were you primarily in charge of, commercial or residential or both?

CELESTIN: Both. I was in charge of both, making sure that the plans for those were properly executed.

BRETON: How did you go about attracting potential commercial ventures? Did you simply entertain requests? Were there requests so numerous that you didn't have to actively pursue, and you just simply fielded the calls and decided which ones you wanted to invite to come and look and purchase commercial property?

CELESTIN: Again, Jim Toepfer or Phil Reilly, if he comes into this, will explain better than I, but I think the only one that we really went after was the mall, because we knew Irvine was trying to develop by the [Irvine] Spectrum area, and who was going to get Macy's first? Who was going to get Robinson's first? We really made it attractive to the developer because it was ready, because we could get it approved faster. We had the approvals for this commercial center. We had the land set aside for it. It was going to be graded for them. It was going to be developed for them. All he had to do was come in and build. The early commercial properties were needed to serve the people. Again, it's a community. You don't have to go outside to do your shopping. Everything's here.

BRETON: So how was the developer of the mall chosen or attracted, the actual developer?

CELESTIN: The actual developer of the mall was—I don't want to say courted. They came to us. They wanted to see where they wanted to develop, north of us or in here. Again, it was meetings with Phil Reilly, meetings with the staff, that these were the things that were going to happen. These were the approvals you were going to have. The land is ready, it is set aside, but

you're going to do things our way architecturally. It was a lot of fun. I mean, we got resistance, of course we did. Phil just beat into their heads that you were going to have red tile roofs because it was Mission Viejo. And the lake, the same thing. The design of the lake commercial came from Phil's travels in Spain and Italy, and he wanted to bring that concept, Spain particularly, Andalusia development also. Phil liked and maintained that thought through us, that this is who we are.

BRETON: In your negotiations for the mall, did the company agree or promise to improve it to some extent, build a parking lot?

CELESTIN: No, that was all the developer. We had the land, and he was going to build. We approved every design. Nothing was going to go in that was different from what the community was, and they understood that.

BRETON: Then the last center. Why was the [Mission Viejo] Freeway Center the last center to be developed? This was a golden retail opportunity with freeway frontage, right on the freeway.

CELESTIN: Which center?

BRETON: I'm talking about the one by Nellie Gail [Ranch].

CELESTIN: Oh, my god. [laughs] Our big box center. That was one long, interesting approval process because the City of Laguna Hills was against us, and they were going to stop it. They wanted the land. Well, it was our land. Phil was not about to say, "No, we aren't going to develop it." We had a heck of a fight with the City of Laguna Hills over the overpass for the railroad. We wanted to come off of Paseo de Valencia and create an [unclear] crossing. Well, they won that one, which I wish they hadn't, because it would have made the access a lot easier.

But that was a lot fun dealing with City Council members. I'm trying to remember the mayor. He and I had many lunches together and meetings to talk about what was going in there.

Was there revenue sharing? No revenue sharing. It's in Mission Viejo. They tried to curtail it, but in the end, we not necessarily won out, but we got the necessary approvals and attracted the big boxes, and it helped their community, too, in a sense. They eventually got rid of Pacific Park [Road], which we tried to name all the way through. That was a fight too. That was a lot of fun.

BRETON: How did you attract major companies to relocate to Mission Viejo, like the Burroughs [Corporation] company and Via Fabricante? Were you part of that?

CELESTIN: No, no.

BRETON: That was before you.

CELESTIN: No, that was before me.

BRETON: Let's now move to residential. At the very beginning, the company was small, and so did that factor into the decision to invite two very outstanding builders to come in and build the first two housing tracts rather than the company itself building the homes?

CELESTIN: That's a question for Toepfer, because I wasn't involved.

BRETON: At what point did the company decide—and you've referred to this and some of the recessions—did the company decide that it did not need to continue building homes, but that it wanted to accelerate the pace and offer land to other developers to build homes?

CELESTIN: The company, at the end of that recession, we had maybe five thousand lots graded, maybe less than that, and we determined that it was more profitable to Philip Morris and us and Mission Viejo Company to sell the land because we got all the approvals, we did all the initial grading, we created the lots, we brought in the infrastructure, and there were a lot of builders at that time wanting to get back and building homes. It was more profitable for the company to sell the land than it was to build the project, even though we maintained all the control architecturally.

BRETON: How did the company go about the process of vetting these companies and making sure that they would be up to the quality standards that you expected and that the residents expected?

CELESTIN: That was really a Harvey Stearn question. But again, it was only those builders whose reputation was sitting out there and who we wanted to attract. But that's really a Harvey Stearn.

BRETON: How did the magnet of the company's success translate to the other developments around Mission Viejo and add to the whole general value of the area?

CELESTIN: I know that the development of Mission in the way it was done was a tremendous influence on the development of projects around us. The first development, [Rancho] Santa Margarita, when they could have developed a long time ago, they followed the progress and the standards that we had put into place. Tony Moiso may argue that, no, we did it separately, but you look at it, and it really is a continuation of the Mission Viejo theme throughout Rancho Santa Margarita and Las Flores [California] and the other developments they have. It definitely was an influence on how we developed Aliso Viejo. Lake Forest [California] decided, I think, to improve El Toro Road and turn it into the commercial success it is because they understood that a cohesive development was a heck of a lot better than a lot here, a lot there, a development here, a development there. Let's bring it together, you know.

BRETON: What financial pressures and considerations led to the acquisition of the company by Philip Morris?

CELESTIN: I wish Jim Gilleran were here to answer that. Jim Gilleran was an auditor sent from Philip Morris. They were interested. Whether or not they'd ever been in land development

or home development, I don't know, but they sent Jim Gilleran out here to look at it, see what was Mission Viejo, what was that development going out there.

I don't know how many years it took, but Gilleran was able— did show Philip Morris that this is something totally unique. Again, it wasn't the Reston type of development. This is a thing that is going to—a “thing,” if I can use that word. This is going to grow into one place where it all comes together and blends, and the profitability of the company is ensured because of the management and the team that is putting this project together. It was so impressive to Philip Morris that I think it was the end of '89 Philip Morris decided, “We're going to sell everything. That's it. We're going to get out of it.”

Gilleran convinced them to give us five years. He said, “In five years, despite this recession we're in, we will have every piece of ground we own approved.” That included the remaining part of Mission, all of Aliso, and the Highlands Ranch [Highlands Ranch, Colorado].

We did it. Five years. We did it quicker than five years, actually, and it was because we had the confidence of the people we were dealing with, the governmental entities we were dealing with, to assure them that it was going to be done that way.

In fact, when Highlands Ranch was bought, the people in Colorado were totally against it. They came out to look at Mission Viejo. We showed them around. We didn't entertain the heck out of them, but we showed them what a planned community was all about and how the Mission Viejo Company went about developing. And they went back and approved the project. They were dead set against it. It was great. It was absolutely great. Once you see Mission Viejo and Aliso and Highlands Ranch, it's a compliment to what can be done and how you can work with government and with people to evolve.

BRETON: How did the company determine the particular amenities that the residents wanted? Did the company continue to conduct surveys of its residents or surveys of other population areas just to make sure that it was headed in the right direction as far as the amenities that they wanted? I'm talking about in the house, the household amenities, whether they wanted cul de sacs; whether they wanted gate-guarded communities; whether they wanted separate family rooms; breakfast nooks; direct garage entry to the kitchen; isolated bed and bath for guests.

CELESTIN: I can answer part of that, and then I'll defer to Harvey Stearn, who is the marketing guru. The street patterns, the park areas were all determined by the land. We weren't going to bulldoze through a hillside to keep a street going. To blend to the land, it would require a cul de sac, it would require a curve and a straight. It determined the design of the land, it really did, how we went about. Jack Raub, in his engineering expertise, was fantastic at looking at land and saying, "This you can do. That you can't do. This is how we've got to engineer it." Jack gets a lot of credit. He was the engineering designer behind this. They were so pleased with Jack, they eventually bought him into the company.

BRETON: Do you know where he is now?

CELESTIN: Yes. He lives in Friday Harbor, up in Orcas Island. Beautiful home. You should see it. Jack's father developed Linda Isle, did all the engineering there. Jack was an avid sailor, and his so-called workshop is bigger than his house. Jack would give you some of the stories that are unbelievable.

BRETON: Let's talk about golf courses. When you were here, the Mission Viejo [Country Club] golf course—

CELESTIN: "Mission Impossible" was already built. [laughs]

BRETON: What about the Casta del Sol [Golf Course]?

CELESTIN: Yes, that was designed and ready to go.

BRETON: The lake. How did the company decide whether the residents wanted a lake, wanted lakefront housing or the amenity of a sailing—

CELESTIN: I don't know if it was so much what the people wanted as to what the vision of the community was and what would help or what would encourage people to move here. What are the recreational needs we could have that they might want? There was no place around, other than the ocean and Irvine Lake, which was miles away, where you could go and fish or boat or swim. It just made it more of a community, again. It was a nice grazing area. There were a lot of cows there at one time, I understand. It was through the ingenuity of Jack Raub's engineering that was able to get the approvals to create this lake, and it was the desire of Phil Reilly to have a community that provided for everything, and we tried to provide for everything. I can't think of a thing a person needs that the company or that the community, the city, didn't provide.

BRETON: It seems that the genius of the lake is that it was so well designed that people came from all over the world to look at it, to see how it was designed, how it could prevent the runoff, the contamination. It has remained as pristine and as pure as the day it was constructed, and the genius was that it was created with a master association, lake association, which, in almost a mandatory fashion, required the residents to belong and to contribute a very small amount, but guaranteed the financial stability of its maintenance. Do you care to comment on the design of the lake and how impressive it was, or on the decision to go with a master association?

CELESTIN: The design of the lake was already determined just before I got here, but the environment around the lake, again, was influenced by the architecture that Phil Reilly conceived of and how it should be accessible to the residents along the lake and those outside, that the residents could have a boat, they could have a spot for their boat to go sailing or fish, whatever

they wanted to do, but yet have the opportunity for the public to come in and have the beach and the boat rentals and open to everybody, not just a closed association right at the lake. It was open to the community.

BRETON: Well, it wouldn't have succeeded as a purely voluntary association.

CELESTIN: No. I don't believe anything would have succeeded in Mission Viejo if it was just a voluntary community. There is a master plan for the associations to work together.

BRETON: Community College. Why was land offered for the establishment of the Saddleback College?

CELESTIN: Again, that was before me, yes, more or less to provide for all of these than for the children who grew up here. You're going to have fun with Toepfer.

BRETON: You were here when Ronald Reagan dedicated it in 1968.

CELESTIN: Yes.

BRETON: How do you build a community with identity?

CELESTIN: You build a community with identity through landform, through architectural form, through desires for what you hope to fulfill in a person's dream in buying a home. I don't mean that to be a big, big, big dream, but I know when we moved here, it was so nice to have the things here that I didn't have where we lived before. It was a blending of everything.

I probably went off-track on that one.

BRETON: How do you create a sense of belonging? How do you create in the neighborhoods a hometown feeling, that sense of belonging, rather than just a row of tract homes?

CELESTIN: You create a sense of belonging by the opportunities available to all residents, by the community activities group, that you involve the people, that decisions are made with the full knowledge of the community when I was here and succeeding me in the final days of the

community, but involving them in the process of the community, the associations, the opportunities they had to participate in parades and the activities, the opportunity to get to know one another at the recreation centers or on the golf course, shopping, going to church. All of that, it brings people together.

BRETON: In what way did things like the chain of title or the license plate frame or the *Mission Viejo Reporter* unify the neighborhood?

CELESTIN: I think that unified the neighborhood because they could see the history of where we came from; where this community came from; where the land came from; who owned it; what was the title; what happened on the land.

“Gee, it was all horses and cows.”

“No, it wasn’t all horses and cows. Before that, there were all kinds of prehistoric animals who roamed this.”

“Oh, come on. You’re kidding me.”

“Well, go look at the big whale bone. We didn’t find that out in the ocean.”

We did archeological studies of all the land. We involved the two Indian tribes, and at times that became a lot of fun, where the Gabrieleños or the Juaneños, who was it? We met with them. If we found artifacts of their heritage, they were involved in determining where it was going to go. Sometimes the two bands of Indians had to work that out themselves, but it all ended up so that everyone was happy with the development of the land because we were preserving it. We weren’t just going in willy-nilly and tearing up land. We were modeling our projects to fit the land, and we were making sure that the people understood through their deed when they got it, their chain of ownership, that they understood what this land was before and why it is today.

BRETON: What did the company do to preserve not just the Native American artifacts, but the fossils?

CELESTIN: The fossils go down to La Paz and Chrisanta. The library here that the city has created has been a tremendous benefit to the community, that they have a resource to go through. The high school students can understand what this land was about.

BRETON: Did the company instruct its graders to stop grading if they ran into a fossil bed?

CELESTIN: We had archaeologists, paleontologists, all sorts of resources in front of the graders. Nobody moved a piece of ground if there was anything of significance in that ground that our archaeologists, that our paleontologists, that our field people found that was going to be dug up. If it was an archaeological find, they were going to have to move their graders around this way because we had control, and we were able to excavate if necessary, preserve whatever was necessary, or say, "Okay, it's okay to continue grading." But we had the people on the ground in front of the graders.

BRETON: I'd like to move now to community pride. What did the [Mission Viejo] Nadadores mean to Mission Viejo as far as building pride?

CELESTIN: What the people realized was that it was their children in the programs, the Nadadores, the swimming, the tennis, that were making national acclaim throughout the world, spreading the word of Mission Viejo around the world. You go to the Olympics, who heard of Mission Viejo? They knew about it when Greg Louganis won five Gold Medals, when [Shirley F.] Babashoff did what she did, what our tennis people did, what they did. That brought world acclaim.

When the [International] New Town Association awarded a designation to Aliso Viejo, they came to Mission Viejo, and the major presentations were at Saddleback College, and the

world recognized what Mission Viejo was about, that a company could take ground and turn it into, again, a place, a sense of place.

BRETON: Were you here at the time that the *Battle of the Sexes* was being filmed or Virginia Slims Tournament?

CELESTIN: No. I wish I was.

BRETON: But you were here for the Olympics. Could you describe the frenzy that took place, the excitement, the involvement?

CELESTIN: Again, it brought this community together again. I mean, the people were involved. They wanted to know, “How can we participate? Can we be a judge? Can we be a monitor? Where’s the grandstand going to be? We’re going to have the bicycle race here. Are we going to do this in it?” The excitement was just bubbling over everywhere. Everywhere. The kids in school were talking about it, “They Olympics are coming!” It made them understand what the Olympics were about that, yes, the Olympics are something that occur in Germany and Switzerland and Iceland and Canada and everywhere else, but in Mission Viejo?

BRETON: Moving on to community spirit—and you’ve already touched on this so much—the community events, Fourth of July Picnic, St. Patrick’s Day Parade, Mission Viejo Days, Five Nights of Christmas, Bunny Days, Halloween, Rose Parade, how did this unite the community? In what way did this create an opportunity for volunteerism, as well as activity, that made Mission Viejo the envy of other towns in California?

CELESTIN: The parades, the Five Nights of Christmas, the floats at the Rose Parade, the swimming events—the Rose Parade floats would not have happened—yes, they would have happened, but because it involved the students, the high school students and other volunteers from the community, they were excited. They wanted to be part of things. The parades, they

wanted to be involved. We just didn't go out one day and say, "Oh, we're going to have a parade down Marguerite." Oh, no.

We got the Activities Committee involved. They got the people involved. They got people excited about things, and it was the opportunity for people in this community again, to be involved and say, "This is us. We're doing this. That float is because of us, not some guy who went out there. Yes, Raul [R. Rodriguez] designed it, but our kids built it. We put the petals on the flowers." People were wanting to get in line to be in these things.

It was an opportunity, again, just to be the community of Mission Viejo. It wasn't, "Gee, Jack Jones over there is the one who did all that." No, no, no. Jack Jones, Bill Simon, Dave Celestin, Bob Breton, everybody could get involved. My sons were involved in things. My wife, she was in the Five Nights of Christmas with [Arthur S.] Art Cook and Ziggy Wilczynski and Joseph. It just was an opportunity if you wanted it, and people wanted in. That's what was great about it. People wanted in.

BRETON: And the parade was unusual because it was a Main Street hometown-type parade, where anybody could march if they wanted to.

CELESTIN: Yes. Out-of-town bands came and other high school bands, and people wanted to be in our parade. It was a great parade right down Marguerite Parkway. It was great.

BRETON: The participation in the Rose Parade and also in the Olympics, that certainly was a great marketing tool for the company, wasn't it?

CELESTIN: It put us on the map again, yes. Who heard of Mission Viejo outside just community? Yes, others in Orange County and L.A. [Los Angeles] County, Ventura County. The world looking at the Rose Parade, "What is this Mission Viejo thing?" It gave us great

exposure as to a company that was creating and maintaining and involving and becoming, and it was great. It was great.

BRETON: I'm going to move to marketing. We're almost through. As I read some of these slogans, tell me to stop if you want to comment. Some of the company slogans were, "It's so nice to have Mission Viejo around the house."

CELESTIN: Harvey Stearn.

BRETON: "Mission Viejo doesn't build just structures, but a better place to live and grow."

CELESTIN: Harvey Stearn.

BRETON: "Beautiful Mission Viejo."

CELESTIN: Probably Phil Reilly.

BRETON: "The world changes for the better when you enter Mission Viejo."

CELESTIN: That was marketing. It was Phil.

BRETON: "There's a place where everything you like about California is everywhere you look."

CELESTIN: That's marketing.

BRETON: "The California promise lives in Mission Viejo."

CELESTIN: That's probably Phil Reilly who developed that. But again, all those slogans were unison, were creating a oneness and your pride. It was a pride remark.

"Where do you live?"

"Oh, the company with the promise," right, or this, that.

The slogans caught, and people wanted to be part of the slogans. Harvey Stearn did a fantastic—I hope he's coming.

BRETON: He's coming.

CELESTIN: Oh, good, good.

BRETON: “Mission Viejo, a magical environment that makes people feel good when they step out the front door.”

CELESTIN: That was us. That was just the company’s way of letting people becoming involved, knowing what it was.”

BRETON: The final one, “The Mission Viejo way.”

CELESTIN: That was, again, marketing, but I think it was all part of the dream of Phil Reilly and Don Bren and Tony Moiso and Richard [J.] O’Neill, the ranch, when they let us let them in, and the vision of Reilly and Bren and Toepfer and the planning process and the design. Who would think of a community goes like this, like that, and like that? Who would think of, “Yes, you’ve got an arroyo here and you’ve got a freeway there. What do you mean, you’re going to build?” It was a vision. It was a vision that I was so happy and proud to be part of, the small part I played in it.

BRETON: I’m going to skip over local governance as far as community associations are concerned, but let’s go to Municipal Advisory Council. At what point did the company see the wisdom of grabbing this new device that had just been created by the state legislature and creating a Municipal Advisory Council so that the company could have the local residents provide a direct input into the planning process?

CELESTIN: I’m going to venture that the establishment of the MAC was an insurance policy for the company. That may not be the right term, but it was a way to assure that the community knew what was going on, an opportunity to come and listen and hear and rely on five people to represent them and to assure them that this dream they bought into was really going to happen.

Never once did the company not involve the MAC and everything it was doing and never once went against the MAC at a hearing.

We worked so closely with the community that we knew that our project had to meet the satisfaction of the MAC, that we were not going to go around them, and they knew it. They knew we were going to sit there and work—we'd had [James] Jim Boulware come and describe architecture. We'd had John Petke up there. We'd have Wayne Peterson there, myself, and [Martin G.] Marty Russo. They had the face of the company, and they knew that the company wasn't just, "Okay, you're there. It's nice. Here's what we're going to do, and whatever you want to say, fine, but we're going over here to get our approval." They wanted your approval. They wanted the community to know what we were doing, and we tried to explain it as best we could at the hearings. We got a lot of good questions, and we made changes based on our discussions and our meetings. Again, that's the community involvement.

BRETON: Did this assist in the overall approval by the County Planning Commission?

CELESTIN: Definitely. The approval of the MAC was if we didn't go have the approval of the MAC, we might as well not show up at the Planning Commission or the Board of Supervisors, because they were the quasi-governmental authority for representing the County of Orange in a community, and if you didn't have the MAC, then don't come here. "We want to know the MAC has reviewed it, that they've approved it, that you've gone with their wishes and made the necessary changes to your project and you've got their approval." We never had a MAC member at the Planning Commission or the board.

BRETON: Conversely, with the MAC approval and their knowledge that this meant local residents' participation in the whole process, then it virtually assured that the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors would okay the project, wouldn't it, if they knew that

the MAC had carefully considered this, had provided their input, made some changes, but then had finally given its approval?

CELESTIN: Planning Commission knew because of our conversations with them and our relationship with the staff, with the Planning Commission, with the Board of Supervisors, that the company would not come to them without the approval of the MAC, and that every project we had before them was approved by the community. Staff knew that. We had members of staff live in the community, and they knew what the community was about. They knew that the company wouldn't go against the MAC, and the MAC was very important. As I said, it was a representative of the county in a local community with really no authority, I mean really.

BRETON: Advisory.

CELESTIN: Advisory. That's exactly what they were, but their advice was taken very seriously, not just the company taking it seriously, but by the understanding of the Planning Commission members and the Board of Supervisors that the MAC was fulfilling a responsibility that they didn't have to go overboard to oversee. They relied on the MAC.

BRETON: Now tell us about the pending cityhood. When it looked like there was a possibility that LAFCO [Local Agency Formation Commission] was looking towards proposals for a Saddleback City and annexation talk, etc., what was the company's position with regard to cityhood?

CELESTIN: Company's position with regard to cityhood was that you can't create a Saddleback City. It's too huge. We've got a community that is a city in all aspects. It's geographically, topographically separated. It's got an arroyo on one side, it's got a freeway on the other, and it is a cohesive unit that functions in all aspects as a city. We were able to convince LAFCO in many meetings that that's how this area should develop. You've got MACs. You've got CSDs.

Allow them to continue doing the work that was set out by the county to do. That's how the communities around us also survived.

BRETON: So did the company oppose any incorporation efforts, or did it support Mission Viejo cityhood?

CELESTIN: Well, we supported it because it was supported on the condition that it be Mission Viejo. [laughs] Yes. We were not going to be part of Saddleback, just no way. Mission Viejo was Mission Viejo. Saddleback was something totally different, and we weren't there.

BRETON: Now I have a series of questions on our last portion which involves the completion of the master plan. What accounts for the unprecedented growth of Mission Viejo, more rapid than any other new town in the nation?

CELESTIN: I would suggest that the reason for it was the community identity, because of the amenities, because of the opportunities available, that I'm going to move into a place that means something. It means I've got a community spirit, after that developed, after the initial stages. We've got schools. We've got parks. We've got recreation. We've got a place where we feel like we belong. We're not part of a huge city someplace. We're part of a neat little community that's growing, that's got everything we want, and what we don't want is very nearby. The accessibility is great, and that the company behind this is one who has proven that what they say is going to happen. They aren't going to lie to you. It was the word of the company, the word of the development community, the word of the people involved, the word of the approval process through the MAC, the opportunity to be involved. It grew because people wanted to be here. They really wanted to come to Mission Viejo. I mean, the Nadadores, "Oh, my god, my kid's a swimmer. Let's go up there. They've got this diving team." Or, "They've got everything I want. Let's go there." That's where they wanted to go.

BRETON: Now, you came on at a later stage, which made it, to some degree, a little more problematical because you had to deal with remnant parcels, and the remnant parcels sometimes meet resistance from homeowners who didn't read their documents when they purchased the land and had the Contiguous Area Reports or where they didn't look at the signs that were on those vacant parcels and see that this was a projected retail center or a projected something else. How did you deal with the planning for the remnant parcels?

CELESTIN: Well, I wouldn't use the term "remnant parcel," because it was one. It wasn't a feeling that, "There's another part of this community which we don't know about, and what the heck's going to happen?" I dealt with it as a planner because of my experience as a city planner, involving people in a process of understanding what the community wanted to do and how it projected its growth and how it involved people in the general plan process. So involving the people in Mission was a lot easier than involving the people in a city, believe me, because a process had been created of involvement, of making sure people understood and knowing that what the company said was really going to happen and that they were going to get an opportunity to be involved.

They knew through the Contiguous Area Reports—I'm glad you brought that up because that one I had totally forgot about, but the Contiguous Area Report let people know that, okay, out here is going to be something else, and over here could be something else, and this is what you're buying into. So they knew what they were buying into. It wasn't speculation. It wasn't, "Gee, I'm going to buy a Castille and no one else is going to develop over there," or, "I'm going to buy a Madrid [del Lago] on the lake and no one else is going to build over here." No. They knew that this was one community, not remnant parcels all over the place.

BRETON: These last questions pertain to your own personal feelings about this experience at this chapter in your life. When did you realize that you were part of some truly magical project?

CELESTIN: When I got hired. [laughs] I'm serious. When George Putnam told me that there was this place down here called Mission Viejo, and, "Why don't you go on the private side? You're doing a great job on the public side."

I go, "Why do I want to go on the private side? I know nothing about it."

It was through the meetings with Van Stevens, with Tom Blum, and even the meeting with Jeff Lauder, and then meeting Jim Toepfer, and then hearing how this evolved and who were the people responsible for it. They were all former public people who worked on the public side, who understood the process and knew that you just didn't go in and say, "This is what we're going to do." No. It was what I, as a planner, believed in. It was the total immersion of a community into the process, that you can't do something and then say, "That's what it is, people." You say, "Where are you? What do you want? What do we want? How do we mesh all this together?"

It was a belief I've always had as a planner that planning doesn't happen without people. It doesn't happen in a vacuum. It doesn't happen with just an isolated governmental approval. It involves understanding the whole process, the land, the need for infrastructure, the needs of people in the future, and it was always in every city I worked in, West Covina, Duarte, San Dimas, Cerritos, it was, how do we make it better? How do we involve the people? Again going back to it, maybe it's trite by now, but how do I get you to work with me to get me to work with you, and then we both get what we want? Okay, I'll give you a little bit more, but next time you may have to give me a little bit more, but we're going to work together. We're not going to stay opposed, because if we are, the project doesn't go ahead until we get it like that, to mesh.

BRETON: Did you attend the conference, the International Cities Conference?

CELESTIN: Oh, yes, yes.

BRETON: How was that received? How were you treated by the members that came from different parts of the world?

CELESTIN: They had seen the plan, you know, a piece of paper, and when they came out and saw the land and the process we were going through in making the land part of the development, they were very impressed. I don't think they'd seen anything like this before. The New Town development was given to Aliso Viejo, but in Aliso Viejo, when that was originally a general plan, it had houses all over the place. When we bought it, we looked at it and we said, "We're not going to go down into those canyons. We're not going to go down in this waterway."

The original plan for Aliso and the county, I think, was 10,000 units—no, less than that—and we had that requirement for 25 percent of the units affordable. We said, "Okay. We've got 25 percent affordable, but we're going to dedicate more than half of this land to the county. We are going to protect it, and we're going to give to the school district the sites." I think those were the things that impressed the New Town people, was that we were staying out of the natural environment and enhancing it by staying on top and dedicating thousands of acres for continued open space and providing accessibility to schools and working out agreements with the schools that, "Here's all the land. You need it for schools. We're not going to touch it, other than improve it for you. We will do that." I think that's what impressed the New Town people.

Toepfer will have a different take on that, too, but I think it was the planning process we went through, the way we worked the land, again, respecting the land and understanding the needs of the county. Who else had to put a corridor through their development like San Joaquin [Hills Transportation] Corridor? Who else was giving away 3,300 acres to the County of Orange

for permanent open space? Soka University [of America] is one of the last pieces, near the last pieces we saw. It was how you treat land, and that's what they were interested in. How do you preserve land? How do you blend land?

BRETON: The company foresaw the need to document your process. This entire process, all the activities, all the events, all the construction, the planning, everything had been documented with photos, press releases, scrapbooks, movies, magazines, newspaper clipping. Why did the company do this? Did the company foresee that this is something special and we should preserve it?

CELESTIN: The company believed that they should preserve it, that they wanted future generations to understand what this was about, how it became, how it evolved, and they wanted others outside of our little community to understand how proper planning and proper utilization of land and involvement of people could work together to create what was created.

BRETON: Do you look back with fondness on this entire experience?

CELESTIN: Yes, I do. Yes, I do, and I really miss it, I really do. It was a tremendous opportunity for me to be involved, it really was, but without the team, no one person can do this. It was a total immersion of the company, people in every decision making and every process. If I messed up, I found out about it, but it wasn't that often. But it was fun. It was a fun job, it really was. I mean, it got hectic. Sure, it got hectic, but it was a fun job, and, yes, I do look back. I mean, my involvement in a process that helped finish creation of this community and created Aliso Viejo is just something—I've got books at home that I look at every now and then, pictures. Sometimes my wife says, "Are you looking at that again?"

I said, "Yeah." It's fun, Bob. It was fun, you know, hectic, fun.

BRETON: You should feel proud—

CELESTIN: Oh, very proud, yes.

BRETON: —of what you've done. Do you have any regrets?

CELESTIN: No, none at all.

BRETON: That concludes our interview. Thank you, David.

CELESTIN: Thank you.

[End of interview]

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