

## Extension Oral History Project – Owen Osborne – Part 3

Date: April 26, 2008

Place: Black Butte Ranch, Oregon

Time: 18:50 minutes

Interviewer: Elizabeth Uhlig, Oral Historian

Transcriber: Sue Bowman

**[00:00]**

Elizabeth Uhlig: This is Part 3 of the interview with Owen Osborne. Before we get too much into your retirement, I wanted to ask you about some of your activities with different professional organizations while you were with the Extension Service.

Owen Osborne: Okay. I guess the one organization that I was probably most active with was a division of the American Society for Engineering Education. It was called the Continuing Professional Development Division. And I had an opportunity to serve that organization to be the chairman of the group and we had a couple of meetings each year - summer meeting and a winter meeting. The winter meeting was always in some summer location in the southern part of the country so that was nice. I was active in that group when I was at Iowa State and also when I was at Oregon State and it gave me a lot of opportunities. We had several world conferences on continuing engineering education and I was able to participate in those.

They were the most interesting. Participation was in a conference in Beijing, China. We were there in Beijing in Tiananmen Square the day they closed the square and so it was a very exciting time. The location where I was supposed to make a presentation had to be changed for obvious reasons. We weren't able to see the Great Wall and the things that we hoped to see. The hotel that we were staying in, Dan Rather, CBS News correspondent, was in the same hotel and every night we would go watch him do the news in his fatigues. He was right there on the patio of our hotel, and we weren't able to go out sometimes because the troops were outside and the trucks. We got to see

some of the things you saw on television firsthand where people would try to block the advance of the troops and try to get them to not be military but support them. My wife took some fantastic pictures of the demonstrations when we were in Tiananmen Square of children and students and protesters. All in all, it was quite an experience.

**[2:35]**

But I think the most important thing we learned on that particular trip was the importance of communication and how lucky we are to be in a free society. We, when we left our hotel, weren't able to fly out on a commercial airline we flew in on; so we had to fly on a military airline and a bus took us there on bicycle paths because the streets were clogged with burning vehicles and tires and things.

We got on a plane and flew from Beijing to Xian, we got off the plane, got on a bus to go to our hotel, got to the hotel, nobody knew from nothing what was happening in Beijing. All the TV had been edited, so they were asking us what was going on and it was really strange. We went from there to Guilin and some other cities. Nobody knew what was happening in their capital, so it was very interesting. But that organization, I was fortunate enough to work with Joe Biedenbach who was from the University of South Carolina who was a pioneer in that field and the organization gives an annual award; has a nice cash award that goes with the plaque and the Joseph Biedenbach Distinguished Service Award. And I won that award one year so that was kind of a great, special, particularly because of Joe.

**[4:20]**

EU: Did you do other traveling involved with that?

OO: Well, we did a lot, I had an opportunity to do quite a bit of international travel when my job would allow it and some of it some people might say was just kind of a boondoggle, I guess that's the word. Can I use that word? You know, when you go to a nice location for a conference, if you are in Iowa, for example, in the middle of the winter and you go to San Juan, Puerto Rico, somebody thinks something's up. Well, something is up. But it's all up and up. While you're there its work; you do have an opportunity to see things and do things. But there were things like that. I had a chance

to go to Paris and give a paper; it was at the NATO Headquarters and translated in different languages, you can't understand or hear them all because somebody's doing that. It was kind of neat, you know, things you get a chance to do and it was fun.

[5:35]

EU: So you said you sort of had a phased-in retirement.

OO: I did. It worked out well. My supervisor was very flexible and allowed me to essentially work or not work. I didn't know how to work half time. I told my boss I could work or not work, so I was able to take a few months off and then go back and work a few months and take a few months off and that really helped me get ready for retirement and understand what I'd do with myself. Fortunately, my wife continued to work for a while after I retired, so she didn't have to worry about what to do with me. I had the chance to figure that out on my own.

And since I've retired, well a couple of things have happened. I have always had a passion for golf and have always enjoyed playing golf and my friends say about my golf game, "Owen shoots in the high seventies to low eighties. If it gets any colder than that or it rains, he doesn't play." Kind of an inside joke if you live in the Willamette Valley and so I've enjoyed golf. But since I've retired, I've done some volunteering in golf and currently I volunteer for the USGA in the Oregon Golf Association and I rate golf courses; establish the slope rating and course rating, the par rating, for golf course. And there's so many new golf courses being built in the state that it keeps us busy. We do several each year and then golf courses need to be re-rated after a certain period of time and I have really enjoyed the friendships. It's an analytical thing so that kind of fits with my background; it involves numbers, it involves analysis, it involves making decisions, exercising your judgment, negotiating with your fellow raters to come up with some numbers that seem to make sense.

And I do that throughout the summer and have had a chance to go to a couple USGA seminars; one just this February in San Diego and previously one in LA. And the nice thing about that is that it's supported fully by the Oregon Golf Association and so it's just

my time I'm volunteering, they take care of my expenses and that's nice. And a nice perk, you get to play golf for free.

**[8:35]**

EU: Now, of course, you're living here in Black Butte Ranch. When did you move here?

OO: Well, it's interesting. We bought this property in 1976, the property that our house is sitting on where we are sitting. Built immediately a little vacation home on the property and kept that vacation home until about three years ago when we decided it didn't make sense to have a nice home in Corvallis and a vacation home at Black Butte Ranch; neither of which we really wanted to be staying at in January and February. Too rainy and gray in the Valley and too cold and snowy up here. So, we said why don't we sell the house in Corvallis, remodel the house here and move up here full time. And then we can go south, snowbird, in the wintertime.

So we called in an architect who we knew and respected to get his ideas on remodeling our house. He said, "Well, I think you should push it over and here's what I think you should do." So that was a shock. We couldn't imagine doing that. So after some starts and stops, we eventually did what he recommended, bulldozed the old house and built this house, which is a one level, appropriate for retirement type house. The only regrets my wife has is I wouldn't build it big enough that all of our kids and all of our grandkids could be here at the same time. So that's kind of a bone of contention. But I asked her, I said, "How many times in the last five years, how many days in the last five years have all of our kids and grandkids been with us anywhere?" And the answer was, "Five days." So well, it doesn't make sense to build another bedroom and another bathroom for something that happens that infrequently. So she's still right on the issue, but we're surviving. I told her, "You know, if the kids all want to come here sometime, there's a lot of big really nice homes here at Black Butte Ranch, we'll just go rent one and we'll move over there where we can all stay together and eat together and play together." But that hasn't happened yet either.

**[11:15]**

EU: So you go down to Arizona?

OO: We actually go, it varies each year. This last year we spent two months in the Tucson, Arizona area and then on the way back we stopped in St. George, Utah and spent a couple of weeks there and we've been doing that, actually I've been doing that since I retired. In fact, the first few years after I retired, Judy would just come down and spend a week or two with me because she was still working. And after a few years she got tired of that and said, "There's something wrong with this picture." So she retired too about five years ago. So now we go down there and spend time and we enjoy it.

EU: I noticed when you were showing me some of your artwork around your house. You have quite a bit of art.

OO: We do. We have kind of connected with the southwestern art, particularly we like a lot of the Hopi art, the Kachina carvings and baskets and pottery and things like that. So now, every year when we go we always bring something back that kind of reminds us of that year and if we keep this up, we're going to have someplace to put it because we are getting more than we need.

**[12:45]**

EU: And you've also gone down to Mexico?

OO: Well, we have been to Mexico. We went to Puerto Vallarta and spent a little time. We don't do a lot in Mexico. Mexico is getting a little scary, to be honest with you and so we had a little scare one time when we were in Mexico and we've been a little apprehensive. We have some friends who are working on a project in Cabo San Lucas area and they want us to go down. We probably will, but our adventures into Mexico were more like driving from Tucson down to Tubac and then venturing on down to the border towns and that sort of thing.

EU: I notice you also have some artwork from Alaska.

OO: We do. My wife had a student when she was at Western Oregon University who was an Eskimo, a Native American from Barrow, Alaska and she has helped us and gifted to us some family things that are just very precious, very nice, unique pieces. We have a whale's tooth, a baleen, that her father carved; very primitive carving, it's not fancy artwork by any means but it tells a story and Alice's Dad did it so it's kind of neat.

**[14:30]**

EU: So, you keep yourself busy in your retirement, both you and your wife?

OO: No question about that. I play mostly. My wife actually still does some work. She volunteers for Habitat for Humanity. Most of my volunteer work, I'm on the board for the local golf club; we have a golf club at Black Butte Ranch; I'm on the handicap committee; I am an OGA director, meaning I'm our representative for this club to the Oregon Golf Association and as I say have been volunteering for the OGA for several years as a course rater. And then I play golf every chance I get. I try not to play more than every other day. There are other things to do.

**[15:35]**

EU: So, are there other things I should have asked you about, the Extension Service or?

OO: Oh, gosh. I don't think so. I guess the only thing I would say is that I kind of backed into the Extension Service. I didn't ever intend to work for the Extension Service as a career. I had something else in mind altogether. It's kind of like I didn't intend to be in administration and I spent most of my career in administration. But it just happened and I realized I was a little bit different in terms of academic background because you didn't find many PhD electrical and computer engineering working in Extension. So it was a little different but I really feel like, felt like, still feel that way, that a lot of the skills and things you develop with engineering as a discipline serve you well, it doesn't matter what you do. And I still feel that way. It's good training. I don't carry a slide rule on my hip, and I don't have liners in my pocket, and I've gotten rid of my horn rimmed glasses, but I still do like analytical stuff and I just find satisfaction in managing

investments and working on course ratings and things like this to keep that part of my brain active.

**[17:23]**

EU: When you look back on the Extension Service, and your career, what are the highlights? What gave you the most satisfaction?

OO: Oh I think probably the best time was when the Extension Energy Program got started. There was a need, a void. We had just exceptional people that we put together in that team. We enjoyed working together; we were very different but complemented one another. I think they appreciated what I tried to do in my role and I know I appreciated what they did and we were successful. It wasn't for long that that lasted for me, because I went on and did something else, but I think, just in terms of excitement and energy in a job that was the time that was special for me.

EU: Anything else we should ...

OO: No, thanks for taking the time to do this. I hope it hasn't been all for naught.

EU: This has been great.

OO: Good.

EU: So, thank you very much. [End of Part 3]

**[18:45]**