

Dave Pottinger Oral History Transcript

This Oral History was recorded on June 17, 2019 in Goshen, Indiana.

Those present are David Leaman-Miller, videographer of the Community Resilience Guild; Ervin Beck, interviewer on behalf of the Goshen Historical Society; and David Pottinger, the subject of the oral history who has led the historic restoration of downtown Goshen. The video begins with Pottinger commenting on the model he has made of downtown Goshen. The model is upstairs in the former Newells Department Store, on the southwest corner of Washington and Main.

The transcript was created by Phil Metzler and edited by Twila Albrecht, both of the Community Resilience Guild.

[A video recording of this oral history is available online at this link](#)

[An interactive version of this Oral History is available on the Goshen Guide](#)

Table of Contents

Model Talk

[Why Use Models?](#)

[A New Vision for Main Street](#)

[The unique elements that Goshen brings to the table](#)

[Restoring the Newells Building](#)

[Residential Vs. Commercial in the Downtown](#)

[Zooming in on Washington and Main](#)

The seated interview

[The story of creating the model](#)

[From childhood to the army to Goshen](#)

[The Early Restorations in Goshen](#)

[What Dave is most proud of - starting the Guilds](#)

[Saving buildings from Demolition](#)

[How Dave has structured his enterprise](#)

[Working or not working with nearby cities and towns](#)

[What Goshen owes to Faye Peterson](#)

[Navigating the different departments and organizations](#)

[Dave's relationship with City Government and widening roads](#)

[The Park and Pavillion across from the Hawkes Building](#)

[The Economics of Restoring old Buildings](#)

[Recognitions for Dave's Work](#)

[Dave's Advice for the Future of Goshen](#)

[The Value of Having a Strong Downtown](#)

Model Talk

Why Use Models?

Dave - Well, the choice to make models rather than drawings was mine simply because I guess I enjoy doing it. But I belong to the Woodworkers Guild, so I have facilities available to do the simple modeling, along with some help from local photographers. But the decision to do it was that my experience tells me that explaining something, or giving a drawing or a sketch, has minimal effect. But when you can show anyone something in the way of a physical model, you

immediately get their attention and their response to what you are proposing. So it's a very, very effective tool, and it's a very simple thing to do, for anyone in the future who would like to do it.

A New Vision for Main Street

Dave - So what we did was — this started many many years ago when the idea had been floated that the city at some point was going to get Main Street back in their control, and they were going to do that by having INDOT and the State and the Federal Highway people put in a bypass of some sort, whether it would be on the south side of town or the north or whatever — 20 years ago that wasn't decided. But it was decided that that was going to happen, and when that did, Main Street would come back into control of the city. And then we did not need 4 lanes of car and truck traffic going through the city — the historic district. And it was at that time that we then began to think about what we could do. What would be the obvious things that you would do? Well, once you go down to two lanes that means you have room for angled parking instead of parallel parking. That increases your parking by a large percentage. You also have available from the sidewalk, out eighteen feet, you have the availability to put in what we call bump outs. And on those bump outs you can landscape it so that the city becomes much more park-like, and also that area can be used by people walking on the street, local businesses who are in the restaurant business and so on, who want to have seating. Those areas give a lot of flexibility to both the customer and the property owner as to how they would individually develop those areas.

And so what you see here is a model that goes from — on Main Street — from Madison to Pike, along with the side street at the corner of Washington, because Washington and Main is the main center of the historic district. And, I can't remember how many years ago this was but, my son-in-law Jeremy Stutzman and I work together on this model, and the ideas were things that our family hatched. Both Maija and Fay were very involved in the idea and the design kind of thing. And so then we went ahead and built this physical model, and have had it on display in meetings and in store windows — things to try and get the general building owners and business owners to think about it, and add their ideas to it.

And now we've come to a point — June 17th of two thousand and nineteen — and finally, where the bypass is in, it's working very well. There is very little truck traffic on Main Street. The car traffic has been cut by a large percentage. And so the historic district has now become a destination for people who are coming down here to shop or eat or whatever, and not just going from Fort Wayne to South Bend. So that aspect of it has worked very well. Now we're getting down to the details of each corner and how we want to design them.

One of the problems in doing that is you want to keep it as versatile as possible, because businesses move in and out, and you can't construct these areas in a very specific way. So we

keep that in mind when we're trying to landscape and/or put in seating and all those kinds of things.

Just this morning, we had a meeting with the city engineering group, and we're ready now to start another phase. And maybe I should step back first and say that when we did this, the implementation of some of this design was pretty well centered around Washington and Main Street. And a lot of this we did because the city seemed to be all right with it, and not restrict us – as a matter of fact helped us - by relocating sewers and doing the things that they needed to do. And so we ended up on this corner with an actual model of how it might work, and what mistakes we might have made or what we should have done more of, and so on. And it's been quite well accepted. And so, now that we're ready to expand on this — we have some restrictions, and it's generally around money and funding – we're not going to do it all at one time. But we're going to, now that we have the crossroads center, Washington and Main established, we're going to move to each end of the historic district and pay attention to the entrance areas, so that when you enter the historic district, you realize you're entering a different place.

And so we've made some changes in the number of bump outs and the size of them and so on. One of the things that for me has been important are these arches. Wherever I travel, I see entrance arches to historic districts. I end up with a real feeling of having entered something different. And so we are going to do our best effort to have an arch on either end of the district. So for now, over the next – the city is going to redo the street surface. And then they are going to re-stripe the parking and where the bump outs will be. And then we, at EID, are going to bring as much as we can afford and that the city will allow in the way of landscaping and bump out design. And that's sort of where we are at today as far as progress. And the hope is that what we do in this sort of interim area, particularly the angle parking, to see that that works and works well, as it has in Elkhart, and then in another year or 2, I think that we will probably be given the approval to go ahead and sort of do the final phase of what we've designed.

The unique elements that Goshen brings to the table

Ervin – So, I would have one question right now. A plan? Did you have this concept and these ideas established long ago? Or has everything evolved slowly over 20 years?

Dave – Well I think — I don't know that others would agree with this — but I think that what we've done is pretty simple. I mean, there's not a lot of variety that you can bring to that, and if you look at other towns who have funded these things, they do similar things, and the only difference that I would point out is that in most all the towns that I have observed, it's done more from an engineering standpoint than an artistic standpoint. And that's the difference that our family has tried to bring to this project. Is that we're all dedicated to form and color. But, the engineering people have to make the sewers work and the lights work and all that, but they're much more structured. And what you'll see is that everything is pretty much the same. If you go

to Warsaw, it's all petunias. If you go to Elkhart, the same kind of seating, the same kind of everything exists corner to corner. And that's fine. But that's not our approach.

Ervin – You talked about your family, and of course that means you, and Faye Peterson, and Jeremy and Maija Stutzman. Is that right?

Dave – Right.

Ervin – Okay. And you're saying that this was a more creative and locally determined design than a packaged one or one that is strictly logical from an engineer's point of view.

Dave – Right. I mean all towns are struggling with this problem. How do you take a historic district and bring it back to life? And I will say this, as I've said to so many people, what we do here is the easy part.

Ervin – The easy part?

Dave – Very much so. Buy a building; go back and see what historic details are still alive in it; bring them back; choose paint colors; do the things that have a feeling of turn-of-the-century, if you will, without being very, very particular — because if you're going to do that, you're going to spend a fortune. You can't afford to do that, so you do it in a way where you get the visual effect, and the comfort from it, but don't become involved in the historic detail to the effect — that's one thing that you can't do, in my opinion.

Ervin – You said it's simple. The alternative would be what, demolition and rebuilding?

Dave – No. The tenants.

Ervin – Pardon me?

Dave – The tenants. Who comes here day in and day out and runs their business successfully. And that's the key if you want to go right back to the beginning. Know your community. That is absolutely essential. Faye and I have talked about it many times. We would never do this in another town around here.

Ervin – Really?

Dave – No.

Ervin - For instance, have you ever been to Kendallville, downtown?

Dave – Where?

Ervin – Have you ever seen Kendallville?

Dave – Sure. Mm hmm.

Ervin – Is there any hope for that?

Dave – Oh, they have some wonderful elements. They have some wonderful historic buildings that are still there and alive. A wonderful old post office that has been — um, yes. But then we're going to get into the uniqueness of why we were able to do this and it has — there is a unique nature of our family and our experience and what we were in a position to do. But once we did that, then it's up to all of these people — the restaurant owners, everybody — to infill this, and spend their life — every morning, unlocking the door — to make it work.

We could have done this, and if nobody came... I mean that's the — that's my point.

Ervin – So you feel you have good support from —

Dave – Oh, absolutely.

Ervin – — from the downtown community and the larger community?

Dave – Right. And I blame that a lot on the Mennonite community, because they're very community oriented. Uh, the college. We have elements the size of our community — you can't do this effectively in a small town, and it's much more difficult to do it in something much larger. Goshen is a neat size. It has a community that responds to this kind of thing. But, make no mistake, restoring the buildings is the simple part of it. You've got to have the community of entrepreneurs to come in and infill it with activity that they are not going to run to the mall for.

I mean, that's the whole key in this. The malls are what destroyed us. So how do we take back from them what the community will support? And that means there's a lot of people who have to step up and say I'm willing to put in a pretzel shop, and our sign a contract for 3 years with this guy, and I'm going to go in every day to and make it work. And so on.

Ervin – Would you also characterize this community as a rather educated community? Or isn't that relevant here?

Dave – Well —

Ervin – I mean with the college and a lot of people sticking around, especially young people — is that — how important is that?

Dave – I think it's very important. Um, it's so easy to say that I hear it so much, and usually that means 3 people (laughs). Whether it's a good thing or bad thing. But, I do here a lot about the young people who went to the college experience, or whatever, and couldn't wait to get out of Goshen a few years ago. And now, they're coming back. And there's a reason for that. The one at the top of my list is safety. Goshen in general is a very, very safe place to live and bring up your kids and so on. We have a reasonably good school system. We have elements here, and it's the right size so that a lot of people know each other. And when a lot of people know each other, you eliminate — you enhance the safety of the community and the workability of it.

Ervin – and you have a prosperous community, and varied industries and business, is that important?

Dave – Yes, but the RV industry, as we all know, is cyclical. And we'll have 10 years of wonderful support, and then for a year or 2 it goes south. It'll happen again, I'm sure. That doesn't affect so much of what we were doing, I don't think. We're not just — we're not just Enhancing a commercial area. In addition to that, we are trying to make it a place where you and Phyllis will come down and have a cup of coffee and sit and talk to your neighbors. It'll be your backyard. And that's a sort of a — that something you can't put numbers on. But when people say — I know, I've a lot of friends who say Yeah, I'll meet you downtown. I'll meet you at the brew. It's a — sort of a general draw. So there are a lot of elements to it, but for me the most important one is the — are the people who — the business owners, and how they run their business, and how interesting it is.

Restoring the Newells Building

Well, the Newells building is an interesting one. And that's where we are today, on the 2nd floor. It was established, I believe, originally they were across corner, 1880s. And then the brothers decided to come over here. And they ended up with both of these stores were the Newells brothers store. And it was basically a clothing store, but they did furniture and a lot of other things — sort of a general store.

When I came here, it was being run by Jay Rounds (??) and his wife, and she was a Newell descendent; she was part of the family. So it had been in the family ownership and activity until — hmmm... The dates will get away from me, but we did this one in 2003 or 4, something like that, when we bought this. And this was — this was a kind of typical restoration. Over the years, it had reduced in size, where they were just using the first floor of the corner building, and it was a woman's clothing store. Nothing much else.

And so, when we went in, there was purple carpet on the floor; there was quarter inch paneling on the walls; the ceiling had been dropped down with fluorescent lighting and we came in here and stripped it. And it was all there: the round windows were open; the Newells sign — they had a huge wooden awning that went all around this corner of the building, and underneath it was the stained glass Newells sign. The one on the front had been destroyed, but the side was there. And so — and then we repainted the color on the outside. And then refinished the floor; took the ceiling out back to the original tin ceilings; put in different lighting; and now you have, when you walk into that building — if you really know (laughs), as Ervin does — it's not a perfect restoration, but it's 90%, and for the average person, it takes you right back in history. This is how it used to be. And it's very desirable to most people.

And that is the pattern that we used building after building: looking at them; deciding to what extent we needed to restore it to its original condition, without being fussy to every possible

detail. And one of the things that we did, and still do, is we remove plaster wall surface to expose the old brick — now that was not original. They were originally plastered. But the brick surface on the inside, at least on one side of each building, really gives you a feeling of a more natural environment.

Ervin – Okay, this is the upstairs of the main Newell’s building. The floors — did you strip?

Dave – stripped them back. Yep, stripped them back.

Ervin – and you sanded these?

Dave – Yep. Lightly. (laughs)

Ervin - Okay. Sort of a fancy design, right?

Dave – Yeah, it’s a chevron design, which I haven’t seen anywhere. And —

Ervin – and there’s beautiful big windows.

Dave – Right. Not original.

Ervin – Not original?

Dave – Nope. They’ve been replaced. I have all the old ones over in storage.

Ervin – Okay, but the shape —

Dave – Yeah, the size is exactly the same.

Ervin – What about the globe hanging lamps? Were those here, or —

Dave – Those were not, but I’m sure something like them were. Those are school globes, which we use a lot in our buildings.

This is unique [pointing up to ceiling]. I’ve never seen — I don’t know that downtown has a tin ceiling on the 2nd floor.

Ervin – Oh I see. I was going to ask about the tin ceiling. So it’s a new tin ceiling?

Dave – No, It’s old.

Ervin – Okay, then did you have to restore it?

Dave – Some.

Ervin – Some. Okay. That’s characteristic of many of the stores you’ve restored.

Dave – Most of the first floors have tin ceilings. Rarely — I don't think I've ever seen it on a 2nd floor.

Ervin – Uh huh. So why did you do this? I mean, it's not being used, and the use of it is sort of problematic. So I'm asking you sort of a personal question: what motivates you to restore something like this?

Dave – Well, there were 2 possibilities. Um, as you know, kitty corner across the Washington Street here, we did the 2nd floor into what we call the flophouse, which are artist studios. And we thought we might do that here — separate this into it studio spaces. There hasn't been enough call for that yet. And in the meantime, I've made a model of a residential — 2 residential units up here. And I think that that's probably — I don't know that I will do them, but I think that's what will probably happen. And if you want to just step back and take a look at that, I'll show you.

(24:36)

Residential Vs. Commercial in the Downtown

Ervin – How have the 2nd floor residential areas been received in Goshen?

Dave – Very well. If you have one, you can rent it. There's no problem with getting — but what someone like myself has to decide is do you want to be involved in residential or commercial? And we've made the decision that residential is not as interesting to us. However —

Ervin – What about selling units on the 2nd floor? Do they sell?

Dave – Selling what?

Ervin – Do residential units on the 2nd floor of these buildings — can you sell them?

Dave – You can.

Ervin – and is there a market for them?

Dave – Right across the street, they condominium-ized that building. And there are 3 people with apartments up there that they own. I own the first floor. So we have a condominium arrangement.

Ervin – but you talk about renting these. Do you prefer that?

Dave – I do, because you keep control of it. If you — and we have that across — if you have residential over commercial, and you happen to have a bar on the first floor that's open until 2 in the morning, the guys upstairs are in trouble. So having control of these things is important. But this is what — [walks over to his show model] this is what I think will happen up here. I haven't detailed the 2nd part, but you come up the entrance here and we have a full apartment. And this

is another concept of mine that I think is worthwhile, and that is: this unit right here, one of the problems of developing 2nd floors is *water in* and *water out*. And so we have designed this so that the kitchen, the bathroom, laundry room, everything is a unit that you can build, and you can put it wherever you want it. And then the rest is open space. And that sort of general living space is what most of the young people like. They like the openness, and so on.

So I think that probably, this will end up being 2 residential units that we will own and rent.

Ervin – Can we go back to the young people. This is really appealing to young people, isn't it?

Dave – Very.

Ervin – The downtown —

Dave – Oh yeah. I get asked all the time, do I have anything downtown to rent, to live in. Yeah.

Zooming in on Washington and Main

[Odd transition...]

Dave – See right now, we have this little planter and we have this (points to bump out by alley entering Washington behind Newells building). That's — and we have outside seating. And then this is the 2nd step. Where you bump out into mainstreet the way we have into Washington.

Ervin – So that's the way most of the corners will look in the future?

Dave – No. That would be — I understand why you say that, but — here, this is again — knowing your community. Okay? And if you've ever been down here on First Fridays, you get half of a block either way from this corner, and it diminishes quickly. And it's one of the problems that some of our really good retailers, like the Olympia — they're 2 blocks away. They have their own clientele, but they don't get the street traffic. And this is the — this — we've succumbed to the fact that this is the center of our center. And so we're going to try and make this much more park-like. Now, when you get to the other corners, it just doesn't make a lot of sense to have this kind of park.

Ervin – So this will be your focus —

Dave – This will be the — It will. And in time, maybe. But for now, if we did this at every corner, it would be wasted. We know that.

The seated interview

The story of creating the model

(28:54) [Transition to seated interview]

Ervin – Well David, tell us the interesting story of how you generated this model that we've been looking at.

Dave – Well I have a funny story to tell. I don't think Henry will object to it. I've a friend, Hank Weaver, who's — Hank is now in his 90s; nicest man you'll ever meet. And I went to him one day and I said I want to photograph the fronts, the façades of the buildings downtown, so that I can get them printed out and use them as a — in a model I want to build. And he said fine, wonderful. I said I have an old bucket truck that I use, how about if you get in the bucket truck on a Sunday when there's not much parking, and I'll just drive down, and you tell me when to stop and when to start, and we'll go right down the center of the street. Fine.

So we did that (laughs). And a day later Henry called me and said, uh, Dave, I didn't have any film in my camera (laughs). He was so embarrassed. So, that was how we started.

Ervin – So you did it again.

Dave – He put film in the camera and we did it 2 or 3 different times. And that's part of the process. And why it's so easy. You get that, he printed it out in 3 foot lengths, you paste it on the OSB board and you cut them out and you put them there and you got a city.

From childhood to the army to Goshen

Ervin – Okay, well let's go way back to the beginning, Dave. Think about your life. Well, about your residence in Goshen? Where did this all start? When did you do the first renovation or preservation around here?

Dave – Well, let me step back further than that, maybe because it may be interesting. When I was a tenth grader in high school, I lived out in the country and I had a lot of neighbors who needed septic tanks dug up and fences made and so on. And so I started a little company with my friends. And I hired half a dozen of them and bought an old Model A Ford and cut the top out — it was a pickup — and spent two summers doing that. So — I had a father who had had a very severe heart attack, and so — I was the youngest of three and my brother and sister were gone, living their lives, and so I was - right from the beginning, I had to work; I knew that. And so that's why that sort of appealed to me.

Ervin – You were a teenager and you had to —

Dave – I was in tenth grade.

Ervin – Wow.

Dave – And then my folks built a very small, modest home. My dad said to the contractor will you allow Dave to work with you? That was the next year. And so that was my first project.

And then I got drafted into the Army, and sent to Korea. And this is — I think is an interesting little piece of it. We were — I was in the artillery - and we were brought off the boat and put in our area, and it turned out we were in an area called Smoke Valley. And what it was was a three or four mile in diameter valley that the — that the enemy could look right into; the mountains were behind, and they could look right in. So it was very dangerous. And what they had done is they had placed 55 gallon drums of crude oil all around the valley, and depending on the wind, they would burn them. So we lived in oil smoke. Hard to believe, but that was it; so they couldn't be seen.

So the old Colonel decides we're not going to do this. He calls a meeting of people, with a bunch of us, and he said anybody here have construction experience? Right? Little Davey puts his hand up. He said here's what I want to do, I want to go up in the mountain right here, and I want to build our battalion headquarters up there. And we'll go back off-line, and we'll log, and we'll bring that equipment up, and we'll build. Can you do that?

No problem. (laughs)

Ervin – How old were you?

Dave – Twenty-one.

Ervin – Okay.

Dave – So, I spent the night wide-awake making drawings — which, I had been a draftsman a few years before. And so the next morning I presented him with drawings of it, and the job was mine. I was a corporal, drafted; I was given 180 Korean servicemen and anybody in the battalion, including a couple of lieutenants, were under my command. And I was given two bulldozers and all the dynamite I wanted. And we carved out a big niche in the side of the mountain. We went back and logged. And we built the village. And I was discharged with a bronze star for — what's the word —

Ervin – So Goshen is simple, comparatively?

Dave – Yeah. So, you know, when you start with that kind of experience, and then you start a real life of getting married and having a home — I've never lived in a new home. Every home was a restoration. And so, when it came to this, this is very simple. But, I also have a family who's very artistic. That's very important. Because — it's not difficult to do the kind of things that most towns do. I don't want to diminish it, it's important, but it's very engineering oriented. But if

you're going to try and do something different, and get a better effect, then you've got to have some different experience, and I just happen to have had that through my life.

Dave's Restorations in Goshen

Ervin – And historically, do you want to say anything about the Honeyville store, or the South Side Soda Shop?

Dave – Well, I was in the plastic business for twenty-five years in Detroit. And that again was a very creative industry, because I was in a very early; it was the thermoforming, which meant you could build molds in two hours. You could develop all kinds of product and ideas very quickly. And so it was a very creative side of the plastic business. I decided to get out of it. I had — I made a connection with the Amish because I was down here selling mobile home trailer parts. They came to me and said the Honeyville store has been closed for fifteen years, would you be interested?

What? I talked to my sixteen-year-old daughter, and said, what you want to do? She said let's go. So we bought the store, restored it, opened it back up to the community. It was a remarkable opportunity. And then, one day my friends, Don Walters and his wife Faye, called me and said the old soda shop is going to be for sale. Do you want to restore it?

Sure. So I joined hands with them, and to my great surprise, once we got it restored to the place we wanted it, we had to run it (laughs). And nobody wanted to do that. So we turned it over to my daughter and her husband, who after thirty-one years are still there, and have a very good business.

Ervin – You use the term restored. Dave, it doesn't look anything today like it did originally.

Dave – No.

Ervin – You turned it into a diner — a traditional diner —

Dave – We built the diner on. Right, and that was a lot — Faye and I collaborated to design that space.

Ervin – So your work in transforming buildings ranges from sort of creating a new structure, like South Side Soda Shop, and uncovering the historical nature of a lot of these buildings downtown.

Dave – Exactly.

Ervin – Okay, good. So, how many buildings do you own in Goshen? Do you know?

Dave – Well, because you asked the question, I have an answer to that. We own I think fourteen buildings plus the millrace.

Ervin – What do you mean plus the millrace? The brick building at the —

Dave – The millrace: the market, the guilds, all of that compound —

Ervin – Yes, the — all right, the millrace. Okay, the former lumber company?

Dave – Right.

Ervin – And how many additional buildings have you worked on for other people? Do you have any idea?

I mean you just finished the Art Deco restoration of the grocery store. You've done work for other people in improving their buildings?

Dave – Well, yeah, I get involved in two ways. I've been on the façade committee for years, and so people who want to do something, come and say what can we do? Two things: what would be appropriate; and what will the façade group support? And so I was at — (inaudible name) and I would go down and we'd look and talk and so on, and then they'd make a proposal to façade, and if it was accepted, then I would kind of oversee the project, getting someone to do the work and so on. Generally, that was how most of the non-owned real estate was handled. I mean a lot of people come and say what should I do, Dave? But getting involved to that extent —

Ervin – So your influence has been a lot more than just the buildings you have bought and fixed up for yourself?

Dave – Oh yeah.

Ervin – Informal, and actual work —

(39:30)

Dave – (reviewing books) There had to have been a number but — for some reason I can't find it.

Ervin – That's okay.

Dave – Okay.

Ervin – I'm sure it's an intangible number anyway.

Do you have any buildings that you're really pleased with —

Dave – Oh, here we go. Twenty singles and five doubles, plus the millrace.

Ervin – What does that mean, singles and doubles?

Dave – We own the bookstore, and then next door, which are double-wides — buildings.

Ervin – I see, I see what you mean.

Dave – So we have five double wides, and twenty single buildings, plus the millrace that we've worked on over the years.

What Dave is most proud of - Starting the Guilds

Ervin – Okay. Is there any special achievement that you can point to here, which pleased you the most; the way it turned out?

Dave – It's a no-brainer.

Ervin – Okay.

Dave – The five guilds.

Ervin – All of your children are favorites, right?

Dave – No. The guilds —

Ervin – Oh, the guilds. Okay, the guilds of the lumber company. That pleases you the most.

Dave – Absolutely.

Ervin – Tell us why.

Dave – because of the number of people it involved, and I can't tell you how many people who are members of one of those five guilds that have come to me and said Dave, I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have this place to come to. And I personally don't know why that — if nothing else happened, why towns don't do that. It's easy, by comparison. The restoration of the facility is one thing, but — getting to understand your community and what they are interested in, and are there key people — that was always the issue: if we wanted to start the clay Guild, we had to go — first of all, we knew that the college had a strong clay program, and that there were a lot of people who continued that process, either commercially or for fun, and so we had to find one or two people who had been through that system, who were still very involved and would be willing to help organize the guild and to some extent manage it. And one after another, we found it, you know; Fred Driver in Clay; Ken Mirer in the Woodworkers Guild; Bob Morrison photography —

Ervin – Judy Weinig (??) for jewelry.

Dave – We went to — I'm sorry, the name's forget — the lady who ran the jewelry department at the college and who had retired, Judy Harzall (??)

Ervin – Judy Weinig-Harzall (??).

Dave – Right. I came to her and said would you be interested in running a guild, and she said well, I just retired, but maybe in a year or two. So we waited. And then she came back and said sure. Danny —

Saving Buildings from Demolition

Ervin – The lumber company was certainly a prime candidate for demolition, right?

Dave – Oh, absolutely. Yeah. There are three facilities that we have restored that were in that category. The millrace, number one. Number two was what used to be Eby Ford, and then Siegmann (sp) printing, and so on on the corner —

Ervin – The gas station —

Dave – The gas station —

Ervin – What is now The Bubble.

Dave – Right. And the third one — I'll remember (laughs), it's terrible —

Ervin – It's okay. That's all right. Is there one project that really bombed, or you're really disappointed with, or —

Dave – Not yet.

Ervin – No worst case?

Dave – Not yet.

Oh, the third one was the half block — the city owned it and were going to tear it down.

Ervin – The electric —

Dave – The Electric Brew, the water department, Ignition Music.

And that is key. I remember going to a symposium at Notre Dame early on, and some fellow from Baltimore, Maryland — or something — who was a very experienced — in this project kind of thing — he said — when he opened his talk, he said, I want to tell you one thing: do not tear down one brick of your historic district. And then for two hours he went through the whole thing, and when he was through he said I want you to remember do not tear down one brick (laughing).

So, that had an impact, because when we entered this process of buying buildings and so on, there was a lot of support for tearing buildings down. The city had already gone out for bids on the half block, okay. The building across the street, which was the — not the Eagles, or one of those organizations that —

Ervin – Oh, that um —

Dave – Wonderful brickwork —

Ervin – Italianate —

Dave – Yes.

Ervin – It's been re-

Dave – They wanted to get that down. Certainly the millrace — get the bulldozer. Siegman (??) printing. All for parking; that was the focus. And that is the big mistake that a lot of towns have made, and will continue to make. Don't tear down one brick. Restore it, and there are other ways to get parking.

How Dave Structured his Enterprise

Ervin – Let's talk about business. Do you have a business? Are you licensed as a corporation or what? Or is this just individual enterprise?

Dave – Yes.

Ervin – Buying and fixing?

Dave – Yeah.

Ervin – Okay, that's interesting, because of all the properties you own and work with. How did you do this work? I know you did an awful lot of the work yourself. But you had other employees. They were contract employees? Or how did you — how did they relate to you as workers?

Dave – Well, most of them were people who were individual contractors — construction guys.

Ervin – Oh, okay.

Dave – And, they are an absolute element to this process, because you couldn't go to an established construction company; that's not their interest. They're not interested in restoration. And so you have to find people who have been hammering a nail in all their life and will take instruction, and work with them; be there. And it was a combination of some experienced people, and other people like Jeremy. He was in college, and in summers he wanted a job, and so this was an obvious thing. And then when he got out of college, this is what he wanted to do.

So there were a number of different people who joined this changing group, but all had experience to bring to it. And then with the guidance that Faye and I would give as to what we wanted done, that's how you proceed.

Ervin – But it wasn't a typical business model; you hired people who were available and —

Dave – Right.

Ervin – and as I said these were contract employees?

Dave – Yes.

Ervin – Okay. And Jeremy — now our mayor — started working with you as soon as he —

Dave – He was in college.

Ervin – — married Maija?

Dave – No, he was in college.

Ervin – Okay, and he continued until he became mayor?

Dave – Each summer, he worked. And then when he got out, he worked pretty much full-time; we worked together. And then he decided to run for mayor.

Ervin – So it's good we have a mayor who shares your vision.

Dave – Well, it's very important, because he has — yes, he has that experience and — unlike I would say a lot of people in that position — he has a broader view of what should and shouldn't be done. So yes, there's support, and he brings that to the City Council and to redevelopment and people like that.

Working (or not) with Nearby Cities and Towns

Ervin – I've been overhearing you for many years, as you know, and I remember one time when you said that the City of Dunkirk, in Indiana, had approached you to help them with their downtown? Am I mistaken —

Dave – Yes, I don't know what Dunkirk is —

Ervin – You weren't —

Dave – I think it's in Germany (laughs).

Ervin – You didn't go to (laughs) — no, that's in France.

Dave – Okay (laughs) — yeah, you're right.

Ervin – But Dunkirk is this little town, which was once very prosperous in the glass industry —

Dave – Oh!

Ervin – And there is a wonderful glass museum with nothing labeled, you know? And at that point, as I recall, you thought of going into a kind of consultancy.

Dave – Yeah.

Ervin – Hiring yourself out as a consultant to towns like that.

Dave – Yeah.

Ervin – What became of that?

Dave – Well you're absolutely right. I'd forgotten that one. Yes, after we had — done the things we had done here, and had a record, we decided to form a company called City Elements.

Ervin – City Elements.

Dave – And it was Maija, Jeremy, Faye, and I — the four of us. And we all agreed that we would take on certain responsibilities in that. And I think you're right; one of the first things is we got a call from a lady who — I can't remember, it may have been Dunkirk — and I — I honestly can't remember what came of it. Nothing. But I don't know why, and what we did. But then after that we got a call from the City of Elkhart, and they said would you come up? We have our old train station that we want to know what to do with. And so we went up, had a meeting with — I think it was the City Council — and strangely enough, Mark Brinson, who now runs the our redevelopment group [in Goshen] was on that group. That was the first I met Mark. And we made a proposal to them, as to one of the ways that we thought they could redevelop that area, and how it could be used. And I think they decided they knew better (laughs).

Ervin – Yeah, they did. They were ready to demolish it.

Dave – They were. But then they decided to keep it, and I don't know what they did with it. But after that experience, I think we all went home and looked at each other and said (laughs) is this really what we want to do? (laughs) Or do we just want to do what we do in Goshen, and let it go at that. And that's what happened. So we disbanded.

What Goshen owes to Faye Peterson

Ervin – You want to say some more about Faye's participation in all of this? What does the City owe to your wife, Faye Peterson?

Dave – Well, Faye, in her first marriage, when I first got to know them, they were in college at the University of Michigan. After that, or during the summers, Don took a job at the Ford Museum in the folk art area with Bob Bishop. And then, because of that, they were solicited by

Colonial Williamsburg, and Don went down there and was assistant curator of the Abby Rockefeller collection — folk art. And Faye was in the reproduction program, where she would look at things in the collection and decide what things might be salable as reproductions, and then go out and establish sources. So — so that was — and at the same time, they were serious collectors with no money. But they used that to build — to start building their own collection, but they also used that experience, and their eye, and their understanding to help build the Rockefeller Collection. And so at one point, I said to them, I know you guys are sick and tired of doing this for Abby Rockefeller, why don't you do it for yourself? Come to Goshen, we'll get in the antique business together, and go — because I had been in the business for a long time and was doing the major shows around the country.

So that's what they did, and — as part of that they divorced, and years later Faye and I were married. But it was their experience and mine that really did mesh, and we had a real consistent interest in the kind of material that we became experienced in. And so when it came time to do this, Faye said, Dave, a building is just a big antique. This is not a problem; this is something we can do easily. So she — Faye never got involved in the physical doing of things, but it was an absolute partnership in, first of all, investment: are we going to — because we did this all on our own — are we going to be willing to put that money forward? Am I willing to take the time and join our experience and make decisions? So that was her part in that, which was serious — and still is.

Ervin – It seems I've heard you or somebody say that she is especially involved in colors — choice of colors?

Dave – In design in general.

Ervin – In design in general, okay.

Dave – Yeah.

Navigating Different Departments and Organizations

Ervin – Now, how about you and government. You talked about the EID, the economic —

Dave – improvement district.

Ervin – improvement district. Is that a government project, or is that a merchants' project — Chamber of Commerce?

Dave – no, it was — the government — it was formed by the City Council — I don't remember the year, but a number of years ago — and is still approved by the City Council — the budget and so on — but they're not at all active in detail. They —

Ervin – Okay. Are these the people who we spoke to last week about the house on Third Street? Or is that a separate —

Dave – Um...

Ervin – Are they the people who sponsored the clearance of those factories?

Dave – No. Well, EID is limited to Madison to Pike — alley to alley.

Ervin – I see.

Dave – We don't go to Third Street or Fifth Street. So it's just the historic – the old historic district.

Ervin – That's right, okay. All right, and the money comes from where?

Dave – The money comes from taxing the building owners —

Ervin – Of the buildings within that district.

Dave – And, the city makes an annual contribution, too.

Ervin – And that has — you've felt comfortable working within that organization?

Dave – Um, yes. In general, I do — um, this needs to be said — I don't care what group you look at, whether it's the Mayor's office, City Council, the water department — any of the city functions — what we do is a stranger to almost everybody in those departments. They do what they do well. But to design this kind of thing — no way. But it doesn't mean they don't have opinions (laughs). And if there's ever a rub, that's where I get — I mean 90% of it is fine, but the 10% where somebody on one of those committees makes a decision that's — their experience says that you can't do this, when it's obvious that it's — it's not right (laughs). Then you have to — you have to work through that, but it — that's what it is. And in general, very good.

Ervin – Does the façade grant come from that organization — the program?

Dave – The façade money comes from — I know I should know, and I'm not sure, but it comes from — I think the city Council and —

Ervin – Okay.

Dave – I'm not sure.

Ervin – We can figure that out.

Dave – Yeah, I'm not sure.

Ervin – But it looks as though the façade program has been a really major influence on the physical appearance of downtown Goshen. Is that true?

(56:35)

Dave – I would say the façade committee — the most important thing they've done is they've eliminated mistakes.

Ervin – Eliminated mistakes? What do you mean?

Dave – People making a decision; they're going to paint their building purple. And the façade committee finds out about it and runs to them and says wait a minute, that's not acceptable. But we will give you up to \$4,000 if you paint it red (laughs).

Ervin – Okay.

Dave – My activity on the façade committee was more proactive. I would — first of all, with Henry Weaver, I photographed the whole town and I made a photographic record of all the downtown buildings in the façade area. And we use that to look at, but I take that and I make priority by the year and say well, here are six of the worst problems. Let's go to them and say we can help you. "Oh really, I didn't know that." Yes. But, we need to have an input on what you're going to do. And almost without exception, they are very appreciative and get involved. There are a few people who know the system, as always, and they know how to get a façade grant every time they want to do something. But for the most part, it's been most — I think most productive, by taking a proactive stance and getting the worst handled. And they've done a good job of that.

Ervin – The façade program has also sponsored awnings, right? Downtown?

Dave – Yes.

Ervin – Which is a major —

Dave – It is.

Ervin – — element in making it a comfortable attractive place to be.

Dave – Yeah. If you'll notice, my buildings don't have many on it.

Ervin – Is that right?

Dave – Well, I think you can overdo it. And if you look at the early pictures of the downtown, they all have these huge awnings that come down — I mean it looks like a tent city.

Ervin – And they also cover the upper windows in many cases.

Dave – Yes, often. So —

Ervin – So it interrupts the architecture.

Dave – Yeah. So I've — I'm all for some awnings, but not everywhere. Yeah.

Relationship with City Government and Widening Roads

Ervin – Okay. I think it would be fair to say that early on, you and the city government — maybe the mayor — didn't get along so well. But now you do. Do you want to comment on that? Or —

Dave – Sure. You're on (laughs).

Ervin – — at least comment on what happened and how that happened?

Dave – Um. Allan Kauffman was the mayor when we started this, and I got along very well — and still do — with him. And Alan will I think say this — this goes back to my saying that there isn't a lot of experience in this kind of thing. And Alan was the first to admit that he had no idea what to do. And so in his area of responsibility, he pretty much gave me free reign. I would go and say, you know this (filler). And he'd say sounds good to me. And — I don't know if he made this announcement to his department heads, but I could call the streets department, the water department, and boy, they would come right down and do what we needed done. So there was a real sense of cooperation. Now, get it in the Council's hands, and ask for some financial support and so on — now you begin to get the personal opinions. And then of course when Jeremy followed Alan — we've talked about that — he had much more experience in what the overall plan was.

My experience of the city has been very positive.

Ervin – Well, you're ignoring the controversy over the widening of Madison Street.

Dave – Oh, sure.

Ervin – When it was approved by the city government, and pushed by the city government, and opposed by the Old Town Neighborhood Association — and you, I think?

Dave – Yep.

Ervin – You want to comment on that?

Dave – Sure. Um, this goes to the heart of city restoration. You have to look beyond — you can't do it — you can do it in stages, but you can't make decisions this way, because when you get down here you realize you've really screwed up. And that was my — I was always asking for a bypass, and I didn't know if that was going to be the County Road Forty area — so that all the RV guys never got here — and then I think it was under Bob McCory (??), they decided — or maybe Mary — that the north sector would work. And I was very — I didn't think that was very

good, but I will have to admit that it has worked well. We do not have the truck traffic and the pedestrian traffic downtown.

Ervin – But the problem was the state highway department.

Dave – Sure.

Ervin – Which wouldn't consider that overpass.

Dave – No.

Ervin – They wanted to send all the traffic across the railroad and into four-lane roads.

Dave – Well, and what you have to ask yourself is if it's finally happened, why couldn't it happen fifteen years ago? And that was my argument. Don't make a boulevard the four-lane highway out of Third Street, *because*, in a few years the millrace area is going to be very much a part of the historic district. And it has to be walkable. So don't divide it. Get yourself on board for this bypass — put your attention there. That was my argument.

Ervin – But the bypass was — we were told — was impossible at that point —

Dave – But it wasn't.

Ervin – — by the state.

Dave – Yeah.

Ervin – The state changed its mind, or found a way.

Dave – Well, that's right. So, don't do Third Street, and keep after the bypass.

Ervin – So that's a place where some grassroots opposition made a difference, I think, in the development there.

Dave – Yeah, they got some sort of a long injunction on certain things. Yeah.

The Park and Pavilion across from the Hawks Building

Ervin – Let's see — tell us about the pavilion that you have been very much in favor of. Is that turning out the way you hoped it would?

Dave – I think so. I don't know how long it's been — twenty years, maybe. Vic Koop, a friend of mine in the Woodworkers Guild, who was a Canadian and a hockey player, said we need a hockey rink (laughs). Really? We talked about it, and I said okay, we can do that. And so I took that on, and for the last eighteen or twenty years — whatever it is — I've built at least three different models; have solicited everyone I know, and at one point, about four years or five years ago, the Schrock — I met with the Schrock family, and they agreed that was the legacy project

they wanted for Harold. And so we were off and running. And after about six months they decided to go against it. And at that point, after all these years, I began to be worn out about it. But it was continued by a number of people — Jeremy has certainly been in favor of it, and has been an important part of it. And it is now to the point where they have contracted with an architectural firm in Indianapolis; they have architectural drawings of what they want to do; they've raised two thirds of the money — I think by next year they will have raised enough funds to maybe break ground. And I think it will — if properly run, again — and it's going to be run by the parks department, not by individuals — I think it will be a real asset for this general historic area.

Ervin – The community foundation has given some money toward it.

Dave – They have.

Ervin – Have you also — are you also one of the donors for this?

Dave – Not yet.

Ervin – Not yet?

Dave – Time. I've given twenty years, that's worth something.

Ervin – And will your concept — your drawings and designs — influence what they're doing in Indianapolis?

Dave – Not much (laughs). Influence, yes —

Ervin – So what are you going to do about that?

Dave – Nothing.

Ervin – Nothing.

Dave – No. No.

Ervin – So who in Goshen then is carrying the ball on that?

Dave – Well, I would say the Mayor's office. I think Jeremy is the one who's kept it alive; he's made all the contacts for financial support; he's got the Council on board, I think, pretty much. Yeah.

The Economics of Restoring old Buildings

Ervin – Okay. These are some questions that sort of are out of place — and maybe David [the videographer] can put them in the right place — Um. Has it been profitable for you to do this

work? By buildings and fix them up, and rent them? Are you making any money, or is this all charity or nonprofit, or public service, or —

Dave – (laughs) The only charity I have is my daughter who runs the Soda Shop (laughs). No, it's a profitable venture. But, for reasons: number one, we have — a community of entrepreneurs who have made the decision — the hard decision — of this overall thing, to set up their restaurant and stick in there and work hard and pay the rent. And we have had a very, very substantial group of local people — some who were not in business at the time, and starting something new; and others who had moved from somewhere else — and so, we have had almost no vacancy. We have been in a position — and this is part of — if you want to call it charity, we have — numerous times — have had to subsidize things in either rent reductions or resold improvements that would normally be done by the tenant, we would do — and things like that. But there was enough volume where you weren't dependent on one or two, and that was - that's key.

Ervin – In doing your financial calculations, have you counted your own hours that you have devoted to these buildings?

Dave – (laughs) No.

Ervin – If he had been paid, you know, thirty dollars an hour —

Dave – I'll take ten (laughs).

Ervin – Okay, all right.

Dave – No. It's not — if you want to compare it to having a job, no. It's not financially —

Ervin – So every city who's going to do redevelopment need somebody like you.

Dave – Well, we can get to that if you want. I have a formula that I'd be glad to share — because as I told you at the beginning of this – more important than just my history and so on — for me, it's now looking back after all these years and saying to the world here's how we did it; here's 80% of what you have to follow; here are the mistakes we made. It's possible — you can do this. But here are the elements that you have to have in place. So that's another thing.

Ervin – And is this formula what we're doing now? What you're talking about now?

Dave – Part of it? You bet.

Ervin – Or have you written it out? Or —

Dave – No. Just —

Ervin – So, we've got your philosophy and this interview, pretty much?

Dave – Well, to some extent. I'm willing to get to that, if you guys have the time.

Ervin – I have another question, first. Have you been the manager of these rentals? Or you do you have a business manager or something? You collect the rent?

Dave – I collect the rent. I deal with all of the broken toilets and the leaky roofs —

Ervin – That’s not easy. That’s not easy.

Dave – It isn’t. It’s, uh — yeah. It doesn’t interrupt my golf game, but it’s (laughs) —

Ervin – You play golf? I didn’t know that.

Dave – No (laughs).

Ervin – Here’s a question you might not want to answer. I’m sure you’ve planned for disposition of your estate. When you and I pass on, what’s going to happen to these buildings?

Dave – Well first of all, I’m not going to die. That —

Ervin – I see, okay —

Dave – We can start with (laughs) —

Ervin – — You got that recorded?

Dave – No, that’s a *real* concern for both Faye and I, and we discuss it with the family; we have a will; we have made distributions to those that we think are interested, and not want to burden them. You know? So, it’s a combination of — and it’s a moving target, all the time, as we get older, or things happen in our life with ourselves or the kids. We’ve moved closer and closer to probably being open to selling buildings to people who are tenants now. We don’t need to own all of these forever. And — so I think we’ve taken care of that. And as I say, it’s a moving target so — (pause).

(Video cuts out when Ervin is referring to the next question maybe?)

Ervin – Okay. So should I ask that question?

Dave – Sure.

Recognitions for Dave’s Work

Ervin – You won some awards — I know you won this — a national award, I think, didn’t you, for your work?

Dave – Yeah — I think one of the early —

Ervin – What was that?

Dave – Well, one of the early ones was the Historical Society gave Faye and I an award for our work. And then, next, I think, came the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns in 2014. They — at Allen's — I think — suggestion, they gave an award to Maija, Jeremy, and Faye and I as a group. We went down to Indy and got that.

And then following that, the La Casa — there's a Dorothy Richardson Award that's given annually, and there are seven districts in the country. And we're in the Midwest, and La Casa recommended us, and told us don't worry, you're not going to get it, but we need to recommend — sure enough, off to Washington we went and got that award. And it was really nice because the other six people were really interesting, down to earth people who were doing things like community gardens —

Ervin – Like you.

Dave – Yeah, it was — it really made me feel personally very proud to be a part of that group.

Ervin – They weren't professionals —

Dave – No, no.

Ervin – — And engineers —

Dave – No.

Ervin – — And so on.

Dave – No, these were — yeah — it was wonderful.

Advice for the Future of Goshen

Ervin – Well, how about summing up. What advice do you have for people who live here, the politicians and other leaders regarding further development of Goshen. I mean we've seen your plans for what's going to happen next, in terms of the change in the downtown streets. Other ideas or directions or advice that you might have?

Dave – (pause) Well, when I look back at our twenty-five or thirty years of this — I think that — it would have been wise of us — and certainly would of others — to get more information on your community. For me, the key to this whole process is knowing your community. I mean, we can all do different things, but if it's not supported, you're dead. So you've got to get into this sort of area where you're talking to people — what if we did this? What would your part be? And so on. And that's city government, it's the mayor, its individual entrepreneurs, it's people who are maybe in another town who've expressed an interest in getting to your town. And if you can

make a substantial summary of that interest, that's the place you need to start. You don't need to start by painting your building blue instead of red.

And once you have that information, and can share that with these other entities — like city government, which is certainly very important — and get their support, and tell them what that support is going to entail: you're going to have to change your sewers; you're going to have to change your lighting; you're going to have to close this street. These are things that are sort of a general plan that you and the city are going to have to think about and tell us if you feel that it's a good idea — and get on board.

And once you get this kind of general plan — (gesturing towards model) this model is not exactly what's going to happen; a plan doesn't — isn't exact. It's a general outline that you can then tweak as you go along, with experience. But you need that to start with. We didn't have that. We walked into this absolutely blind. We walked into it on the basis that — that the town was going dark, like a lot of them were. A lot of the retailers were very marginal, not only what they were offering, but they weren't doing good business for themselves, and were going to last.

We didn't survey any of that. We just decided that we were going to take the part of restoration the physical buildings, and then hope that that would attract — and it did. But it did because of Goshen (laughs).

Ervin – But for you, David, that was intuitive or experiential?

Dave – Yes. Mm hmm.

Ervin – Whereas city planners — professional city planners — you know, have to come up with a rational —

Dave – Dot 'em and cross the tees. You bet.

Ervin – So is that what you're calling for? Or —

Dave – I'm calling for a culmination — because I'll get to the second part.

Um — so, if you have — if you've — somebody has to do that; somebody has to call for an overall plan. Well who would that be? It could be — it could be anybody. I didn't own a building; I didn't own a — I didn't sit on a committee; I didn't do anything. I'm just a guy who decided hey, this would be fun. Right?

So, that has to somehow get organized to some extent. But when you do that, then you've got to move to the different players that are going to have to be on board if it's going to work and work well. And the city is the starting point for that.

But then, you have to have some individual components that just happen to be in my — myself (laughs), I don't want to say that —

I had the experience of construction; I have experience in the antique world, not just of tables and chairs, but buildings, color and form. Um —

Ervin – Good taste.

Dave – Well, that comes out of the experience. Yeah, Faye and I argue about taste all the time, but — yes. And then you have to have the finances. I mean everybody points to that first, you know? Who's going to buy it? Who's going to pay for it?

So all of those elements happened to fall with Faye and I. We had enough resources to do this incrementally; we made a decision we'd like to do it; and instead of going for the overall plan and so on, we just decided to do it by example. And that also works, but it's a lot more risky. Because you're going to run into problems on the way that you could have solved to begin with.

So, my advice to the city planners — is — if you're fortunate enough to have somebody like Faye and I — which is very rare, and I realize that — then you're going to have to go and find one or two or three people — or foundations, or a combination — who say, you know, this is a ten million dollar project that we're looking at here. Are you interested? If you are, give us a number. Three million? Good. We got you. So you've got the financial side, which is often a stumbling block; you've got that covered. Now, you've got the city on board; you've got a general plan. And now you can start going to the community — in a number of ways, and get their feedback. Which I will say, 90% of it is useless: its opinion; it's not based on experience; it's not based on much of anything, but well 'I hate angle parking.' Why? I don't know, I just hate it. My grandma doesn't like to back out.

So — it's not rocket science. But it takes a combination of experience and effort that's rare. Restoration of small towns is not (laughs) something that everybody does. And often those that do it do it carelessly, or they do it with individual interest — and that doesn't work. It has to be something that you either do and show them that it can be done — and then you get them on board, or you get the plan and know that this is how we were able to do it.

So that's my general — and I'd be glad to talk to anybody in the world about it.

Ervin – And I'm sure it has turned out different — or better — than you ever imagined. Maybe not, but —

Dave – I don't think we ever imagined; I think we just were doing it piecemeal. And were very fortunate that this community liked it, got behind it, and are doing a lot.

David LM – Could I add a question?

Dave – Oh absolutely.

The Value of a Strong Downtown

David – Community development, or what you've been doing, or what's been happening to the downtown over twenty years — how would you define that? Or maybe even more basically, why is it good to have a strong downtown?

Dave – Yeah.

David – I know that sounds basic, but I'd be interested to hear your answer to that.

Dave – Well, that's a very good question because — we have now — you haven't, David, but Ervin and I have lived through the period of a small town being the center for a lot of things — not just commerce, but activities of different kinds, and so on. And when the doughnut took place, it changed the ballgame, because the commercial side of it really suffered. And there were — as in Goshen — there were a few people — families, generally — who hung on to their businesses — the jewelry stores, the different places, who are real old-timers here. But they can't support the overall. Um — so, how important is it to have a historic district? So what? I can go to the mall and get everything I want. I can go to the perimeter around here and order every burger that's been made. Why is it important? And we talk about that a lot at home. And there was a time when I thought it was always — it was only important to the older community; they had this nostalgia about what they lost. And frankly, I think we were wrong. Because it's people like you — and I'm sorry to hear you're leaving — but it's people like you, who have come into this, and for whatever reason have been drawn to the Brew, or to this, or to the — what's the place down — the old electric place down here, the bar —

Ervin – Goshen Brewing?

Dave – The Goshen brewery, that they did such a nice job on. Or the market. Or the guilds. Everybody seems to be drawn back to a physically defined, historic-looking, feeling place.

Ervin – A community, I would say. You know? A community focus.

How do the malls and the strips, you know, define a community? The downtown does.

Dave – Yeah.

Ervin – I mentioned Kendallville. Have you ever been to Marion, Indiana?

Dave – Yep.

Ervin – Isn't that horrible?

Dave – Yep.

Ervin – I mean that's a wreck of the city. It's hopeless, I think.

Dave – I think some of them are. But, they're hopeless, I think, because of the community — not because they can't do it. They just don't — they either don't have community support at the political level to start it, or an individual or a small group who decide they want to take this thing on.

What's been done here is pretty remarkable, I think, because — everything sort of fell in place. And mostly, the people who came to support it. But I —

Ervin – And maybe it was the right time, because they say, you know, after a couple of generations, the new generation looks back and sees what was important and can be important and useful and pleasant right now. I think there are generational gaps — or lags — in regard to historic things.

Dave – Well, the malls offered that to a whole generation who really didn't have it. Boy, they could go down there and hang out, and just — it was a wonderful place, but — I don't know, that's a little above my pay grade to figure out why people do what they do (laughs).

Ervin – Yeah, it's sociology I guess.

Dave – I think that Goshen should be very proud of itself for the support they've given to this.

Ervin – Well Dave, when I think about you and this work that we've been talking about, I'm reminded of Pericles of ancient Athens, who was the tyrant — or we would say the mayor or the president or whatever of ancient Athens — and he is quoted as having said, "I can't lead an army into battle, but I can make a small city great." That would be my tribute to you.

Dave – I'll buy it, because (laughs) I could not lead an army into battle. And if I have a shortcoming — and I do — it's my (pause) — my lack of tolerance of groupthink. I've said this so many times in a meeting: you want me to do this, I will do it. I will not be a part of design by committee. I will not do that. And I don't know any successful project that goes that way. Frank Gehry makes the decisions. He has a lot of people who have experience, who were giving him information, that allows him to make the best decision — I can fit into that to some extent. The problem with this kind of thing versus Frank Gehry, is that I have absolutely no control. I don't have a position in the city, I don't have anything except my own individual investment in time and energy. So it's very hard to make that comparison, but if I have — and I know this — if I have a failing, it's the fact that I have a short fuse when listening to opinion instead of experienced ideas — which makes me not a good team player. Sorry (laughs).

Ervin – (laughs) Maybe we should put this segment somewhere else, rather than at the very end.

Dave – (laughs) Right.