

Leslie Anderson

Side 1:

Leslie Anderson came to the mountains from Jacksonville, Florida with a Girl Scout program, and liking the mountains, decided to go to college in Western North Carolina.

[4] After working with the Pisgah Girl Scout Council she became Executive Director of the Asheville-Buncombe Youth Council, working with high school students. This council has since been given to Buncombe County following the water agreement. (see Ralph Morris and Norma Price tapes) This program, which is now faltering was based in the Recreation Department (see Ray Kisiah tape), and she headed the youth program in culture and art for the Bi-Centennial. Sunday in the Park (now under Quality Forward) and the Thomas Wolfe programs were started at this time. [Ray Kisiah]

[48] While there is a bit of tension between natives and newcomers, there are a number of organizations working for the welfare of the city. People come here with visions and, for a town this size, there are many resources and areas where volunteers can contribute. People move here because of the quality of life offered.

[81] Having a clearing house for volunteers (such as Placement in the Junior League) has been tried by the Arts Council and the Chamber of Commerce but it is very labor intensive to keep information current and available.

[90] The City Council is very sensitive to local attitudes, and before any changes are made, there are many surveys and opinions sought. However when proposed, well-advertised work gets started - which trees come down or roads are started - there is always someone who starts a group movement, "No one asked me!" And so there are further discussions (i.e.. Pritchard Park planning and the Chestnut Ridge University Center). (Enclosures)

[136] She believes two heads are better than one and 20 better than 10, but while group ideas are good, there needs to be a cut-off point. She has been with the city 20 years and sees a deeper willingness of City Council to be responsive to the public. Most of what gets done is done with volunteers who have had no professional training. When debates go on too long, volunteers can burn out and feel trivialized. Sometimes volunteers tell the council things they don't want to hear - or cost money. It takes years for projects to come together and council is elected every 2 years. This means constant retraining by the staff - which often gets caught in the middle.

[251] Employees in the Downtown Development don't have her longevity, staying in their job 3 to 5 years.

[267] One of the programs she is most proud of is the Downtown Development program started in 1986. There had been other merchant groups like Quality '76 and Quality Forward, but there hadn't been any major focus on the community.

[271] In the early 60's and mid 70's, like many southern cities, downtown suffered from the "white flight" and the major department stores being sucked out to malls. This became a wake-up call. Quality '76, put together to honor the Bi-Centennial, brought an awareness to the community that this had to be dealt with. A downtown revitalization program was put together by the mayor's office. Bele Chere festival was started and the "Villages Plan" where pockets of harmonious characteristics were studied. While this was being developed, Strouse Greenberg & Co. of Philadelphia came and made a proposal. (see Walt Boland and John Cort tapes) They proposed that 20 square blocks in the center of town be leveled and a convention Hotel, expanded Civic Center and department stores be built. The city was divided - groups formed using TV time and phone banks. The feeling went deep. In 1979 citizens voted 2 - 1 not to undertake the project. The mayor put together another Downtown Revitalization group and hired a national consulting plan to present (1) information on retail and residential potentials, and (2) bring to the table any developers interested. [Roy Trantham, Zuceri Hunter]

[356] In the early 1980's the South Eastern Historic Properties Co. remodeled Wall Street. The Schneider group did the Pack Plaza project and Robert Armstrong from Burnsville bought Ivey's Department Store and developed the Haywood Park Hotel. This was done with a minimum amount of city money (street repair, sewage, underground pipes and electrical wiring.) This was visionary and very successful. (These projects are described in other interviews along with Xerox material.) [Robert Armstrong]

[386] In 1986 Discovery, an organization created by people interested in quality development and funded 2/3rds by the city and the rest by corporations and individuals, put on a program-workshop. The plan never got finished but created some good working documents and recommendations. Discovery Day (highlighting local history) was started and interest in developing the Grove Arcade was spearheaded. Because of insufficient funds, Discovery folded.

[445] Urban Designer Workshop was held in April 1986. Doug Bean was hired as city manager - wanted him to do something about the downtown area. He had been successful in Morganton, NC and had a lot of experience. In August he set up the Downtown Development office. Leslie Anderson was working in the Recreation Department at the time and Doug Bean asked her to start this new department. They started from scratch, and funds came from the Urban Design Action Grant, corporate donations, memberships, surplus from events, ticket sales, and Department of Transportation money. They work closely with the Chamber of Commerce and Becky, the economic director there. [Douglas Bean, Becky Anderson]

[481] Handmade in America is working well. Ray and Becky, whose ancestors go back several generations, worked out concepts for marketing native crafts - drawing artists into the area and helping them market without restricting their freedom. [Dan Ray]

Side 2:

Downtown has a vital role to play in attracting people. If it is vital, interesting, and strong economically, it is a signal to a person to locate here.

[2/16] In 1986 a number of things were involved in making the city attractive. The city had not invested in the above ground and subterranean areas in the past 30-40 years. Streetscapes (furnishing the "downtown living room") improved looks and functioning, and marketing approaches were coordinated. There are two primary groups working to develop the area and encourage growth: the Downtown Association Board, made up of merchants, and the Downtown Commission, made up of 12 members appointed by the Council to represent the public at large.

[2/98] In the 1920's a nationally known planner worked out a city plan which showed great foresight and involved ringing the city with green and not leveling everything. There were a number of other studies - the Urban Action Plan in 1986 and the Master Plan known as the 2010 Plan. Hours upon hours were spent on getting citizen response. A mandate was given to the Council to develop downtown and a signal was sent to developers that the city was alive and thriving. Twice a year she (Anderson) is to report to the Council on what is done in each area. The 2010 Plan called for a Master Plan but the Council said "we have studied this to death" - so they worked out a skeleton plan - 4 or 5 small plans - the Streetscape, Economic restructuring (real estate related, i.e. matchmaking tenants with spaces, investors with developers, developers with vacant buildings) etc. [John Noland]

[2/188] Her office has been involved for years in the Pack Plaza project. It was Estelle Schneider's idea to have the Plaza Theatre as a cultural center - she gave it to the city and the city put a lot of money into the Plaza project. Pack Place (see McGuire tape) and Pack Plaza have anchored the city. It was a hard fight and, while many said wouldn't work, the numbers tell the story. [Schneider Nine, Roger McGuire]

[2/253] When she was with the Recreation Department as a youth culture and art supervisor, the need for adolescent training on pregnancy issues became apparent. She started working with the JC's and the Youth Council, and it was decided to start a Planned Parenthood Group. In 1969-1971, a small group offered sex education in an office and in school rooms (see Stevens tape). She was involved in public relations working with mental health groups, OB-GYN groups and hospitals. There was a need to be more intentional and Planned Parenthood of Charlotte, NC was asked for assistance. People took a fair amount of risk - it was not an issue easy to settle in this city but a good base was created, funds were raised for rent and salaries. The office has just moved from McDowell Street to Biltmore and (see enclosures) clinic services are provided. While abortions are not provided in this office, the older physicians are strong supporters. [Cissie Stevens, Dr. John Henderson]

[2/345] She is not on the Board right now but knows about current activities. If a pregnancy test proves positive, the alternatives are discussed - keep the baby, put it up for adoption, abort. The National Association has stringent criteria for recommendations and there are two clinics in town. FemCare, 62 Orange Street (see Billy Cline tape), and the Western Carolina Medical Clinic, 9½ Reed Street. There is a fund which helps poor women pay for services. Planned Parenthood works with the schools when possible. [Billy Cline]

[2/427] This is a country-wide problem. It is a difficult area to be volunteer in. Not everybody wants to use discretionary time working in an area 50% of the people oppose. However, "if you believe women should have a choice about the management of their own fertility, then you

generally believe that strongly." A great number of men are also involved asking for donations, hosting a dinner, serving on the Board. Enclosed editorial, "Help limit it now, or we all suffer later," 9/13/94, is discussed.

[2/474] Her name was suggested by Jane Mathews to the City Manager for the Circle of Excellence Award (see enclosure) of the Leadership Asheville Alumni Association for her work with the Children First Organization. She is one of the founders of the Child Advocacy Institute. Each five years since 1980 there has been a major conference on children to take stock of where we are with kids in the community. In 1990 she had rotated off the board but was asked to chair a conference - a major initiative was launched - to involve businesses and make it a call to arms - Children First was established. "Business as usual" was not going to work. Churches, groups, foundations, neighborhoods, families and existing organizations were involved. It is very extensive; a 20 year commitment has been made. [Jane Mathews, Douglas Bean]

In high school, she was a distance swimmer and she has taken this as a metaphor for life. All things are long-term projects - everything takes about 20 years.