

Luke Atkinson

Side 1:

[00] Luke Atkinson came from Waynesboro, NC, where he worked with General Mills. When he was transferred to Asheville 39 years ago he decided to open a furniture store here.

[10] He compares the city over the past years. It was predicted that the new 4-lane cut through the mountain would kill West Asheville. In reality it relieved traffic pressure and business is better than ever.

[30] The city used to look drab but, having been chosen a model city, things changed. The City Council, mayor and first woman council member were Republicans. The new airport was built, the civic center, the finest Farmers Market this side of Atlanta and UNCA established. [Barbara Keleher, Mayor Wayne Montgomery]

[78] Originally West Asheville was to have been the center but the surveyor, who was sent down to lay out plans, got drunk and surveyed the wrong side of the river. Downtown used to be retail center but business dried up due to the malls (Westgate and now Biltmore Square Mall).

[91] The Asheville Merchants Association works to promote retail business. Advertising on TV and radio is important. His store serves customers from Burnsville, Canton, Greenville, Waynesville and Black Mountain. Downtown draws business from Charlotte, Spartanburg, Murphy and Atlanta. Westgate was one of first malls. Coggins (developer of Westgate) said grass would grow in the streets of West Asheville, but this was not true and now Westgate has lost to some of the other malls. Business in West Asheville is better than ever. [George Coggins]

[144] His father had a furniture store in Columbia, SC. He chose his location because there were stores in Asheville and a need for a middle-line store in his area. There isn't enough parking in Asheville. Westgate spoiled people and ladies are afraid to go out at night. He doesn't think he will see a renewal of activity in Asheville in his lifetime.

[183] The Civic Center is doing a lot to bring tourists to town. Retail business is improving every year but property taxes for water and sewage have quadrupled.

[212] Asheville is a good convention center. Grove Park Inn depends on conventions and tourist trade.

[249] Asheville is a good tourist town and will be even better when the new highway to Knoxville goes through.

[257] Because of diversity in small businesses, Western North Carolina has the lowest unemployment rate in the US.

[277] Regarding tobacco, he feels that the NC State legislators will never let a ban on smoking be passed. People are smoking now more than ever and no rule will keep them from it. NC is a big tobacco state.

[339] County businesses are opposed to annexation because of tax increases.

[359] He was asked by a Democrat on the city council to run for council membership. Although 40% of the people who vote in elections are from West Asheville, it is hard getting anyone to run because it takes time and a lot of work to get elected and serve. He went from door to door campaigning - so did Barbara (see her tape). The newspaper and TV push people from North Asheville (lawyers, doctors) and look down their noses at West Asheville. He is always pushing to get someone from West Asheville to run. [Webb Anderson, Barbara Keleher]

[473] The West Asheville Business Association has a problem in that, while residents want good government and fair taxes, most businesses are a one-man affair and can't afford time off. (See enclosed).

[521] The Asheville parade put on by the Merchants Association doesn't help West Asheville. They put on a little Christmas parade. He was chairman one year.

Side 2:

When he went on the City Council, he went to the Institute of Government in Chapel Hill to learn about the laws. A council member was put on the board of the Chamber of Commerce so that adequate reports could be obtained.

[2/58] He did his homework before meetings. He served on the Election Board for 3 years. He was not elected for a second term.

[2/100] When he campaigned for the council, he opposed a raise in taxes. He now feels he made a mistake in this stand as it became necessary. However, he reworked the budget to show how the police could be given a raise without raising 33%. He feels that many people can be defeated even though they are doing their best for all the people.

[2/140] Civic leaders come from the northern section of the city. They are better educated and have a higher income. This difference started before his time. West Asheville doesn't have the necessary confidence. There used to be a local weekly newspaper.

[2/194] The people in West Asheville join the Asheville groups. However, the schools, Park and Recreation and Libraries are good.

[2/239] He decided to be in West Asheville because there was a need for his business and the building was available. He has had an increase in business every year. His accountant has remarked on this. [George Wood]

[2/254] He is personally involved in the Better Business Bureau, Rotary Club and West Asheville Rotary Club (he has a 25 year pin). His brother-in-law used to work with him in the store but has retired. His wife, Becky, works with him now. [Becky Atkinson]

[2/179] He considers West Asheville a little city of churches. He belongs to the Calvary Baptist where there is a good preacher and good music. He attends almost all the time.

[2/289] There is more drug use in North Asheville than West Asheville. "Tobbin was taken down the mountain" for drugs. The West Asheville Merchants Association is working on the problem. \$500 is offered to a person who turns in a violator. There is no trouble with winos now. Conflict over abortion is not a problem. Blacks don't constitute a problem in West Asheville but, when he was on the council, there were problems on Eagle Street. [Philip Crafton]

[2/385] A-B Technical College is doing a wonderful job. His daughter, Linda, teaches nursing in Charlotte. Another daughter is in Massachusetts as a chiropractor. She graduated from Chapel Hill. He has a son Marc. [Jack Davis, Linda Atkinson Brinton, Dr. Sally Atkinson, Marc Atkinson]

[2/484] He foresees great growth in this area within next 15 years.