

We met at the Commissioner's office in Lakeview and sat in the hearing room. Ken wore jeans, cowboy boots, and a button-down shirt. He had gray hair that is thinning and he is in good shape. He is soft spoken and was eager to fit this interview into his schedule. He was really busy, so I tried to keep it short. He was very kind but has an air of sadness to him, which was especially evident when he talked about losing his wife shortly after he moved here.

Carly Johnson: How long have you been living in Lakeview?

Ken Kestner: 7 years. I came in March of 2000, and why did you decide to move here? Well, I had been with the FS, started off in CA and then moved up to Oak Ridge on the Willamette and spent 14 years there, and I would periodically come over to this area here just to enjoy the open space, and then I transferred down to Utah, and I got married about that time to a sweetheart down in Oakridge and we would pass back in fourth. We did to stop here. You know, we would get here about night fall and then go. And she liked the area and I liked the area, and so we decided that we would eventually retire here, so about 2 years after being in Utah, there was a job opening with BLM. I put in for it. She put in for a job with the FS and we moved here.

CJ: Did you both get positions?

S: Yes, and we had bought 40 acres out on the way to Plush to retire on before we ever moved here.

CJ: So you were all set...

KK: Yes and the intent was to come here and sink roots and retire.

CJ: And so you did. So, what has your experience been like so far since you moved here?

KK: Well, overall it has been positive. I did lose my wife to cancer shortly after we came here, but I am still going to remain here. Experience has been good. Fold have been very good. I like the folks. And I really, what we both noted was the good rural values. She grew up in the country also. And for me it is kind of like I grew up on a farm outside of little town about the size, well, smaller than Paisley, and went to school in a town about the size of Lakeview, so for me it is kind of like I made the full loop of all my experiences and came back home. Except, I am here

KK: Instead of back in Arkansas.

CJ: So what kind of those rural values? What kind of values are here?

KK: Watching out, helping each other, friendliness, for the most part, you know good integrity. That is very, very important to me. Now, once I have lived here for a couple of year, as any place, you begin to see the other factors or fractions but as a community as large, it is still a down-to-earth, friendly, cooperative good integrity.

CK So kind of on the other side, what kind of challenges have you faced living here?

S: Well, getting over losing my wife took quite a few years. Working with the BLM change of different managers was a little challenging there. But with the community at large, I really haven't had any major challenges. I jokes with my wife about running for Commissioner at some time, so I decided to retire a year ago March and start the house that we had envisioned, but I said, "I need to get to know the country." I need to give something back to the county, so I ran for country commissioner and I won by 28 votes. Well I passed the primary by 28 votes. And I swamped the general election.

CJ: So how long are you County Commissioner?

KK: It is a 4 year term. I took office last January.

CJ: So you are by no means retired now.

KK: No, I call it a career change at a reduced pay.

CJ: So this has been a huge way to get involved in the community. What other things have you done to get involved?

KK: Working with BLM, I got to know several of the major ranchers and things because most of the BLM is in ranching. So I got to know several and good working relationship with some of the local ranchers. And come water users. We had a dispute out in Warner Valley and I joined the Elk Club just for what little social activity there is there. And I go to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation banquets. And also I am a board member on the hospital, Board of Directors, and I am member of the Veterans of Foreign War.

CJ: Wow, you have a busy schedule.

KK: Yes, if you look at my house, I haven't cleaned it in, I won't say.

CJ: So you plan to retire here? Is this home now?

KK: It is my home.

CJ: What are your favorite foods?

KK: Broccoli. Veggies in general. Fish, but I don't get it. I love fruit but I don't do it enough, but I do eat my veggies.

CJ: Do you grow anything?

KK: I grow a garden, and I have even grown okra here. And tomatoes is my favorite crop. I used to grow up to 45 plants, but I am down below 20 more. But I can and freeze and dry and the excess I have I give to the hospital kitchen.

CJ: So how big is your garden. How much space do you have?

KK: About 2.5 times the size of this room [0.24 acres maybe]. I had to build a fence to keep the deer out. A little just north of town on the hill and my place is the first diner coming down off the hill. I have anywhere from 3-30 deer, so I had to put up a 6-foot fence. And grow corn, okra, squash, chard, spinach, beans, onion, you know, the whole works.

CJ: So how much of your diet do you think you get from that garden?

KK: During the summer plus canning, 40%.

CJ: And where do you buy the rest of your food?

KK: Safeway or Stewarts. And of course, you have been in there. We are glad to have both of them. It would be nice to have a little broader selection.

KK: What would you like to see there?

CJ: Well, the produce between the two, Stewarts usually is better and Safeway, it depends on the shipment. I would like to see a deli. Safeway was interested in a deli at one time, but they had dispute with ODOT as far as ingress, egress and stuff, and so they said, the hell with it. But I like oriental food. Foods of other countries. I would like to see some Mediterranean style food and southern nation style food.

CJ: Do you eat at the Mexican restaurant her?

KK: Periodically, but not often. It is the best Mexican restaurant we have in town. It is the only one. I have eaten authentic Mexican food, and this is the best Mexican restaurant in town.

CJ: So what do you usually have for dinner?

KK: Veggies. And maybe a little bit of meat. I am not a big meat eater.

CJ: So do you do stir fry or salad?

KK: I do a lot of stir frying. Broccoli is one of the best foods you can eat.

CJ: And especially out of the garden. It tastes so different out of the garden..

KK: Oh, it does.

CJ: So, what are three things that you appreciate about the food system here in Lakeview?

KK: That we have one. [Pause while he thinks of something] OK, 1) we have 2 stores; 2) I have a garden, 3)... that is tough one.

CJ: So then the next question is, what things would you like to see change? What things about the food system are a challenge?

KK: Well, when you say to food system, you are basically going back to Safeway and Stewards and my garden. Maybe a little broader selection of veggie types. I mean, it is nice now and then we get some Anaheim peppers, but it is hit or miss sometimes. Homemade salsa I would love to have. There is a lady in Silver Lake that makes homemade salsa and sells it at Stewards, and I try to get on top of that as quick as I can because it goes fast.

CJ: Just buy it all up when it comes in?

KK: Yep. One thing I notice about Safeway, they get something that I really like and as soon as it is sold out they discontinue.

CJ: so what are those things, or is just...

KK: It is general thing. Now they have started carrying white merlot wine, and I am waiting for them to discontinue it.

CJ: I have never even heard of that.

KK: It just came on in the past year. I prefer Chardonnay usually. I am not a big red wine drinker, but I do like merlot, but it is a little stout, and white Zinfandel is a little sweat, and white merlot is in between Zinfandel and White Zinfandel and merlot, so it is right perfect.

CJ: I'll have to give it a try...so it sounds like you must have had some experience gardening before you moved here?

KK: Well I grew up on a farm. We had a garden 20 times bigger than this room. Shelling beans I will not do again.

CJ: So does your whole family have a background in food production?

KK: Not at this time, no. I am the only one.

CJ: Do you have any special family recipes that you still eat?

KK: Not really because I didn't pay that much attention. People say, "well you are from the south, you must have eaten grits.." and I say, I never had grits until I got out of high school. Well, you must have eaten poke weed. No. I keep saying no, no because my mother is from Kansas. It is meat and potatoes and rice. Rice is one thing I do enjoy. Brown rice.

CJ: Can you get that here?

KK: Ya. Sometimes it is a hot or miss.

CJ: So, do any of the groups that you belong to eat meals together?

KK: The Elks used to have, not on a regular basis, no. At the Elks we have Friday night and we contract with a cook, but on Saturday night sometimes the elk men get together and have a hamburger or a fish fry or something like that. At the hospital, they have their own cafeteria so sometimes I sit in at lunch or something just to socialize with the employees when we have the Board meeting at 6:00 usually the kitchen will serve us. VFW is kind of like tow section, you have the men's section and the woman's section. They used to have a potluck the first Friday, and I don't always have time to make that either.

CJ: How do you think the farmers and ranchers are fairing in Lakeview right now?

KK: Well, farming and ranching is an up and down business. I call it the business of managing debt. I haven't delved into their finances or anything like that of course. It is a risky business. When the market is down, they struggle. And anything that increases the cost of production makes them struggle. Fuel cost is one right now. Environment constraints is another one. I assume most of them, I know just from my own experience growing up it is a management of debt. Well, farming is because farming machine is so expensive. You don't see that type of machinery here. Huge combines and things. But still it...some of the bigger ranches that have lots of acreage probably doing ok. As acreage goes down it gets tough.

CJ: And what about low-income, elderly folks, or people who disabled, do you know where they can get food in this community?

KK: Well, we have the food share program that Burney Burkeholder... I haven't really had the chance to really get involved with it that much...

CJ: And do you know where the food comes from in this community?

KK: I suspect. I have not inquired. Maybe I don't want to know, but I suspect somewhere in CA of course, in the valley, and lots of other fruits and veggies probably also come from South America. I would assume. And of course, when you get to there, I like to wash my veggies and fruits because I grew up on a farm that used herbicides quite freely and other countries still do.

CJ: Is your garden organic?

KK: I use some commercial fertilizer, but I put a lot, it was basically clay, I put a lot and lots of compost and sand.

CJ: sounds like that is a challenge here, the soil,

KK: Yes, it is. You have to spend a lot of time and a lot of money to get it enhanced.

CJ: What about the meats or the fish that you buy in town. Is any of that local?

KK: Not that I know of no. You get the not, well, if you go to the meat locker it is mostly local. And I am increasing my patronage there.

CJ: So have you heard of other people in the community that are trying to make changes to the food system here?

KK: I have not come across that.

CJ: Is there anything else that you think we should know about the food system in general?

KK: No. I haven't had time to really think about food stuff because I don't, lots of people eat because they are driven to eat. I am driven to fulfill my nutritional need.

CJ: Where do you think Lakeview is going to be 20 years from now?

KK: It will be a little bit more crowded, but now overly so. Some of the values will change, but I think the core values will remain. I think it will be, I believe it wouldn't get the transportation system. We have the north south system and an east west system. The east/west system has some trucking size limitations on it that prevents trucking from coming through, but I think Lakeview would take a leap greater than Burns or some of the other eastern towns just because of the local scenery and things. And the value of the area. I think...the lady named Liz that was here on that first panel that moved down to CA and came back. Her statement of people who come here and stay here are those who like to be independent and likes a good challenge. And that, I think that will maintain a lot of the value here. But I got a feeling that we will see good growth in that group of people in the next 25 years. And it would add substantially to the sustain-

nability of the economy. We bottomed out several years ago and we are struggling, but I think it is moving up, and it will continue. The world is getting populated. People got to go someplace.