

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Allen Owen**

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Interviewer: Jane Goodsill and Karl Baumgartner

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20 Pages



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Transcript

GOODSILL: Let's start with how you got to Fort Bend County.

OWEN: I grew up in Marshall, Texas and went to college in Nacogdoches, which is the oldest city in Texas. I married a lady from Houston, Jane Crawley, who did not want to move to Marshall. (laughs) I can't blame her. So I moved to Houston in 1967. We've been married 48 years.

We lived in Houston for six years, had our first child, Marcus Allen Owen, and then moved to Missouri City.

GOODSILL: Why did you move to Missouri City?

OWEN: Because of the schools. The reputation of Fort Bend Independent School District (FBISD) was a lot better than Houston Independent School District. At that point in time, our son was getting to elementary school age and Fort Bend ISD had a great reputation, so we moved to Missouri City.

Three years ago I retired from spending 39 years working for Wells Fargo Bank, which is 155 years old, and has a lot of deep roots in Texas. I was District Manager over all the branches in Fort Bend County.

GOODSILL: So you did that while you were mayor?

OWEN: Yes, I did. I've been Mayor for 21 years. I served on the City Council for eight years prior to that, so I've been an elected official for 29 years. Prior to my serving on City Council and as Mayor Pro-tem, I served on the Planning and Zoning Commission for five years.

GOODSILL: That's good training.

OWEN: It was. I did that because of my banking knowledge. They wanted someone on Planning and Zoning who worked with developers and builders, so that's how I got started serving the city 34 years ago.

GOODSILL: Tell us about the connection between banking and planning and zoning.

OWEN: The Planning and Zoning Commission in any city deals with new development that's coming in and zoning issues. Missouri City is a zoned city. The City of Houston is not and a lot of cities are not zoned. Richmond just became a zoned city. Rosenberg is not.

GOODSILL: Tell us what that means.

OWEN: That means that if you are living in a subdivision and someone wants to build a service station next to you, that property has to be rezoned to do that, and you, as a property owner, have the right to object to it. The Planning and Zoning Commission makes a decision whether that is the proper use of that piece of property. It protects the property owner from having undesirable things next to his home. It also prevents certain types of businesses from being in your city, such as sex-oriented businesses, bars, etc. Zoning is what does that.

There is a big zone map and every piece of property is zoned a particular way. When you become a zoned city, the first thing you do in your master plan is go through and map out the city and determine what is commercial, residential, or agricultural. Each piece of property is zoned and that's how it stays until the Planning and Zoning Commission changes that zoning status. Let's say we have a piece of property that is zoned 'industrial' and the owner of that property says, "I've had this property for forty years, it is zoned 'industrial', and I have not found any user for it. But I think I can sell that piece of property to a developer to build homes. So I would like to have that property rezoned from 'industrial' to 'residential.'" The Planning and Zoning looks at that, they listen to any testimony from people who come before them who might object to the change or might like the change. Then Planning and Zoning makes the decision whether to rezone that piece of property. That zoning then becomes permanent until the next property owner comes before them and says, "You know what? It really was better as industrial" I haven't been able to sell it as 'residential' and I want to rezone it back to 'industrial commercial'. That's the process you go through to do that.

If a large subdivision is zoned 'residential' those people realize that there can't be a factory put in the middle of it without it being rezoned. When you go into Houston you can see every kind of business in the world located right in the middle of a residential subdivision. You'll see service stations or any kind of business right next to a house because the residents don't have any rights. Every once in a while you'll see residents get all upset that there's going to be a Walmart in their subdivision but the city can't do anything about it.

GOODSILL: Was Missouri City already zoned when you started your tenure?

OWEN: Yes, it was.

GOODSILL: Tell us a little bit about the history of Missouri City.

OWEN: The city was established in 1895. It was a railroad community. So the people who originally came to Missouri City came from the state of Missouri, with the Missouri Pacific Railroad. The early developers of Missouri City wrote back home to the people in Missouri and told them it was a great place to live. It had a lot of sunshine and the weather was great. So they started migrating to this area and liked it so much they wanted to name it after their home state. In 1956 the city incorporated. They issued a charter and became an incorporated city with a City Council. The charter dictates everything from there on, such as how many people are on council, how they are elected, the boards, the commissions, and when elections are held.

GOODSILL: How many council people are there?

OWEN: There are seven of us. I ask kids today, "Why do you think there are seven?" There are three at-large members including the mayor. I serve on Council as a council member and there are four district seats. There are seven of us so there is never a tie. If we expand Council, we have to expand it by two in order to keep an odd number.

GOODSILL: The reason you would expand it would be because of population growth?

OWEN: Yes. You would probably expand the districts. You might have five districts and three at-large plus the mayor or you might have more districts. If you look at the City of Houston, I think there are 23 council members.

GOODSILL: Do you have a City Manager?

OWEN: Yes. There are two forms of government: City Manager Form and the Strong Mayor Form. The city of Houston is a strong mayor form and it is a full-time job. The mayor is the CEO (Chief Elected Official) of the City of Houston. In smaller cities such as Richmond, Rosenberg, Sugar Land and Missouri City, we have the City Manager form of government which means the City Manager is the CEO (Chief Executive Officer). When kids tour the city, the easiest way for me to explain it to them is that we are like a corporation. I serve as the Chairman of the Board, and there are six other board members. We hire a CEO and he's called the City Manager. The City Manager, the City Attorney and the City Secretary are the only three employees who report directly to the Mayor. All other employees report to the City Manager. I have 75,000 shareholders, called citizens.

GOODSILL: What was the population when your tenure began?

OWEN: Probably 16,000.

GOODSILL: How many mayors has Missouri City had?

OWEN: I'm the 10th.

GOODSILL: I'd like to know about city departments, transportation, water, and horizontal development.

OWEN: The largest department in the city is the Police Department. I believe we have 90 sworn officers on the streets. They have the most employees. I believe Public Works would be second, with 50-60 employees. Public Works employees are the people who take care of the streets that you drive on every day, keep the ditches clean and the water out of your house, all of those things you consider 'public'. We contract garbage. Some cities have garbage, and some cities have water and sewer departments. But in Missouri City, we contract garbage, and we have 33 municipal utility districts that provide the water and sewage. We are the MUD (Municipal Utility District) capital of the world.

GOODSILL: Why do you need so many?

OWEN: They are set up every time there is a new subdivision.

In Sienna Plantation there are eight MUDs because as each section was developed they had their own MUD. The reason they do that is MUDs raise money by selling bonds. They have to put the streets in, the storm sewers in, and the water systems in. Only the people who live in that MUD district pay taxes to that district.

BAUMGARTNER: Is the city run completely by MUDs or do you have a water district? Recently you put in a big water treatment plant to deal with some subsidence issues. Who did that?

OWEN: Those are ours. The City of Missouri City owns and operates two waste water treatment plants plus the surface water plant that you are talking about. It's the largest single project the city has ever done. But it is being paid for by all of those MUDs. They are participants in it. We put it in and we paid for it by issuing bonds, but the MUDs are all paying to use those facilities.

BAUMGARTNER: They are servicing the debt by purchasing water from the city?

OWEN: Yes.

GOODSILL: How do the MUDs get their money?

OWEN: They sell bonds. Only the people who live in that MUD pay the taxes in that district. That's why you have 33 different tax rates out there. Places like Quail Valley and Meadowcreek are debt free because those plants were built over 30 years ago. Typically you issue that debt for 30 years. Sometimes you have to come back and reissue debt if you have to rebuild the plant or something. That plant was built with 30-year bond money and over the next 30 years those MUDs will service that debt.

That's different from Stafford. Stafford is in what's called a Water Control and Improvement District (WCID). They may be the only one left in the state of Texas. The difference is that a WCID has a board and if they want to dissolve themselves, they have to vote to do that. In a MUD, the city has the right to take them over at any point in time that we feel like we need to.

What do you have MUDs and WCIDs for? They put in the streets, the storm sewers, and all the infrastructure and the city doesn't have to do it. At some point in time, the city says, "We're going to take you over." There's a formula for doing that. Again, we get back to the taxes. As an example, a MUD in First Colony has \$1.67 MUD tax. City tax is \$0.54. Some of my subdivisions, the larger ones, don't have any debt in their MUDs. So if I were going to take over a \$1.67 debt and spread it out over the rest of the city, I wouldn't get reelected. (laughter)

You have the debt in the MUD and you have the property tax in that utility district that is servicing the debt. You take the property tax and the tax the individuals are paying to service that debt. When the revenue of the MUD equals the debt service, then the city will take it over, because it is self-sufficient. We will do that over a period of time. So even though we have issued debt on that surface water plant for 30 years, at some point in time those MUDs will have paid themselves down and we'll take them over. Then the city will own its water and sewer system, totally.

BAUMGARTNER: So you have the right to take over a MUD? It's your choice?

OWEN: Yes. But a WCID such as Stafford has can't be taken over by the city unless the WCID board decides to allow them to do it. That's why there are no more of them. It's like the school districts. Stafford has the only municipal school district in the state of Texas.

GOODSILL: Does the zoning plan for the whole city include where schools are going to be located?

OWEN: Yes, it does. When a developer comes to us for a project, like Sienna or Riverstone, the larger subdivisions, we always want them to set aside property for schools. It's zoned that way. So if you were to move into that subdivision and you wanted to see a map of what that subdivision looked like, you'll have parks, any kind of right-of-way issues such as streams, school sites, and you might even have church sites. They are already platted that way. When the city accepts that developers plat, all of his property is zoned that way until he comes and asks for it to be changed.

A lot of property in Fort Bend County is Ag (agriculture) exempt. So was Missouri City. We still have a few places that have some Ag exempt property, meaning that it is zoned for agriculture. Property zoned that way pays a different tax rate.

GOODSILL: Is it used for crops or to raise animals?

OWEN: It's probably used for animals. Sammy Magana still runs cattle on the old Frost Ranch near Elkins High School. He's an interesting fellow. Two years ago he was voted into the Texas Rodeo Cowboy Hall of Fame. He still runs a ranch right behind Elkins High School. He was Mr. Frost's foreman for years. There are a lot of people like that still around.

So every piece of property is zoned and when somebody wants to change it, they have to come before the Planning and Zoning Commission. There are two hearings. We have to post a sign on the property prior to the hearing, notifying individuals that there will be a public hearing, to give the citizens a right to come and be heard. After the two hearings, Planning and Zoning makes the decision of whether to allow the change or not, and they send it to City Council with a recommendation and City Council makes the final decision. When it comes to City Council, if they don't think it is an appropriate use of this piece of property, Council can accept that recommendation or disagree with the recommendation.



Sammy Magana was elected to the Texas Rodeo Hall of Fame in 2011. The Fort Bend County Fair and Rodeo honored Magana for his commitment to the youth and sport of Rodeo in 2010.

If the change is turned down by both bodies, the owner of that property has the right to appeal to another commission, called the Board of Adjustment. They are the final decision maker. If they turn it down, the next appeal is District Court. So they are actually the most powerful board that we have because they can override City Council. District Court is the only venue that can overrule the Board of Adjustment.

GOODSILL: Let's talk about parks.

OWEN: We have 22 parks in the city, the largest being Quail Valley Golf Course, which is 400 acres of park. Even though it is a golf course, there are parts of it that are passive park areas. That's an interesting story in itself in that Quail Valley was a privately owned golf course. It was established by Jim MacNaughton who developed Quail Valley forty years ago. He built the country club. It had changed hands two or three times and there was a group out of Houston and Dallas and they bought the golf course. In their mind, it was not making the money that it should make. It was zoned 'recreational facility'. Here's where you can see the importance of zoning. They came to me and asked if I would consider rezoning the golf course to residential and commercial use, because it wasn't making money and they wanted to shut the golf course down. You can imagine that the residents who owned houses backing up to the golf course were very upset about it.

So I informed them that the property would have to be rezoned and I wasn't planning on rezoning it and I doubted anyone else on City Council would. They threatened me and said, "If you don't rezone it, we'll just shut it down and let it grow up in weeds, and turn it into a ghetto." I said, "Let me introduce you to two words that obviously you are not very familiar with. The two words are eminent domain." They asked what that meant. I said, "It's going to be a public park." It's the same reason we can take property from property owners for highways or anything else. You go through eminent domain proceedings. You have to do it justifiably; the court has to allow you to do it. I told them, "I'm going to show it's a public necessity." And that's what we did. That was five years ago.

To explain how eminent domain works, they have an appraisal and we have an appraisal. They made the mistake of shutting part of it down and letting it grow up in weeds when we did the appraisal. Their appraisal said it was worth \$14 million and our appraisal said it was worth \$3.1 million. They were pricing it as develop-able property. We'd already had testimony that there was no way to develop and build houses on the fairways of the golf course. You had to put streets in. It was impossible. We had an eminent domain hearing; it's a 3-person board appointed by the County. They never even showed up for the hearing and the Commission awarded them \$3.1 million.

We knew they weren't going to accept that and they appealed the decision to District Court. We were getting ready to go to trial; we had been through depositions. We finally said, "Let's make an offer and get on down the road." By this time people were really concerned at how it had grown up in weeds. There were over 100 houses for sale in Quail Valley. People were leaving and the prices of the houses had dropped to \$57 a square foot. This was in 2010.

Once you have been through the hearing, you present your check for \$3.1 million to the County Clerk and the property is yours. You have to wait if they want to appeal it, but the property is yours. That gave us the right to start cutting the grass and cleaning up the property. At the same time, we decided we would have to do other things to it, so we went to the citizens with a \$17.5 million bond issue to buy the property, improve it and do some other things with it. It passed by the largest margin of any bond issue I've ever done. People understood what the value was.

So it was on the tax rolls at about \$7.5 million. They had asked for \$14 million and we had offered \$3 million. If you ever go to court, you know that juries sometimes are not real favorable toward government 'taking' anything. We figured that the best case scenario was they would 'split the baby', splitting the difference between \$14 million and \$3 million, so we offered them \$7 million. We knew a jury would say it was on the tax rolls for \$7.5 million so it must be worth that since no one protested it. They never said it was worth \$14 million either. So they took our offer and we were able to build a new facility called Missouri City Centre. We have about \$33 million invested in the property now. It is a public park and is one of the 22 parks that we have.

We also have Buffalo Run which is over by Marshall High School and has the only public boat ramp of any city park in Fort Bend County. We did that through a grant from Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD). I have the only Urban Forester on my payroll, Paul Wierzbicki. We hired him through a TPWD grant. The City hadn't been thinking about having an Urban Forester, but with 22 parks we needed one.

GOODSILL: That must be a fun part of your job, the creativity and coming up with new ideas.

OWEN: It is. Community Park, which is our next largest park, was done with a TPWD grant. Going back to Quail Valley, it had two golf courses and a tennis and recreation center, which these same people owned.

They sold the tennis and rec center to a church but failed to tell the church that before it could be a church, it had to be rezoned. There was no way we were going to rezone the property sitting in the middle of the subdivision as a big church because of the traffic it would create. The church had gone out and sold bonds to their members to build their church, and when they couldn't get their zoning changed, they defaulted on the bond issue and went into bankruptcy. So that property sat there.

I went to TPWD again and working with my elected officials, Joan Huffman, Kyle Janek, and Charlie Howard, we applied for a million dollar grant to buy this tennis and rec center. I went to Bankruptcy Court and bought it for \$1 million. Then we put another \$3.5 million into it and today I have a first class tennis and rec center, with 13 lighted tennis courts, a work out facility with seniors programs and all kinds of things. Again, I used other resources to help me do those sorts of things. When we do a survey of the citizens, parks is always the number one thing that is most important to them. Kitty Hollow Park is in Missouri City but it is a County park.

People look for ways to recreate. In fact, Quail Valley Fund which is the Home Owners Association (HOA) for Quail Valley, which has 3,700 homes in it, is about to spend \$500,000 putting in a playground facility in part of that park that was Quail Valley Golf Course. There were 400 acres in the golf course: 2 18-hole courses, a 9-hole course, and then a 9-hole 'pitch-and-putt' par 3 course. When you do a bond issue, you have to have something in it for everyone. Not everybody plays golf. So we decided to leave the two 18-hole courses and take the 9-hole course and turn it into a passive park with jogging paths and we planted over 100 trees in the park. We have a tree donation program. The par-3 is about to become our First Tee facility, which is a golf program that teaches kids the nine core values of life.

If you watch TV you'll see many of the big golfers have been involved in the First Tee Program. President George H. W. Bush and his wife, Barbara, were the first chairmen of First Tee. George W. Bush is the current national president of First Tee. I have over 20,000 elementary kids in Fort Bend County Schools who are involved in the First Tee program.

GOODSILL: The values of golf such as ethics, honesty, regulating yourself are very useful.

OWEN: Those are the nine core values of life. They use golf as a subject to keep them occupied. But it's about teaching honesty, integrity, sportsmanship, respect, confidence, responsibility, perseverance, courtesy and judgment. It takes a full sized facility because a lot of it is held after school.

If you have bad weather, you need to have a building for them to go in. We've had 650 of the older kids go through the program and we need a facility. We're in the process of embarking on a capital project to raise \$1 - \$1.5 million to build this facility. The city is donating the land which is worth \$1 million. Quail Valley is going to take a corner of that passive park and build a \$500,000 playground facility for the public. They are using city property so it has to be open to the general public. We think it will help attract younger families to Quail Valley. Quail Valley is an aging community.

GOODSILL: Is Quail Valley pretty much the geographic center of Missouri City?

OWEN: Yes. Quail Valley was the nucleus and everything else was developed around it. You had old Missouri City which is off of Highway 90A and that's where the original people lived. The DeWalt Cemetery sits in Lake Olympia and you'd never know it was there. It's by the Freedom Tree. Do you know anything about the Freedom Tree?

GOODSILL: Tell us.

OWEN: The Freedom Tree is located on the back side of Lake Olympia subdivision and it's where the slaves were told they were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation. It's registered in the National Tree Registry. It's over 200 years old. It's a live oak tree that has limbs larger than most of the trees around us. When Paul Wierzbicki came to work for us, I told him, "Paul, if anything happens to that tree, son, you're gone!" So his main goal is to take care of that 210-year-old oak tree, whose base is as large as this room is. It's right in the middle of Lake Olympia and we're trying to get a Texas Medallion for it. They don't like giving Texas Medallions for things that are living and could die so it may not happen.

State senator, Rodney Ellis, is very interested in that tree. There are probably 300-400 saplings from that tree that are planted all over the United States because our Parks and Rec guy grows trees from the acorns off that tree. We've given them out all over.



State Senator Rodney Ellis and Mayor Allen Owen (l-r) meet at the Freedom Tree in Missouri City after the Ride For Pride in 2013.

There is still a family living in Missouri City whose grandparents were freed under that tree. It was on the Palmer Plantation. We also have Sienna Plantation and the Dew House. Those were the big plantations that were in Missouri City. Sienna was more of a sugar cane plantation. Palmer was a cotton plantation.

GOODSILL: That brings me to another question. What is the ethnic breakdown of your city?

OWEN: It is 42% African-American.

GOODSILL: Has it always been?

OWEN: No, and it's very interesting. I guess over the years as the Medical Center has developed, you will find that the largest employment base in the Medical Center is African-American. We are 15 minutes from the Medical Center.

Sienna has a lot of doctors in it because of its proximity to the Medical Center versus The Woodlands. With the Fort Bend Toll Road, they can get on the toll road in Sienna and the first stoplight is IH-610 and South Main.

GOODSILL: Did Missouri City have anything to do with helping with the Fort Bend Toll Road?

OWEN: Absolutely. Where the Fort Bend Toll Road is today, was originally on the transportation maps as the Bay City Expressway. If you go to Hillcroft and South Main and you turn right on Hillcroft, you will see that Hillcroft is split into inbound and outbound side. Those were the proposed feeder roads of what was going to be called the Bay City Expressway.

If you go into Houston, all the way up to Belfort and South Post Oak, you will see that the shopping center sits at an angle. The reason for that is because it was on the right-of-way for the Bay City Expressway, which never happened. That stayed on the transportation maps for years and years and most of the property that the Fort Bend Toll Road goes through today belonged to Memorial Hermann Hospital. They sold it to the county. I don't remember what year it was, but I think it was 1993-1994, when Fort Bend County decided there needed to be a Fort Bend toll road. There was a study done by an engineering firm about the usage of that toll road that cast doubt on its being justified; it probably wouldn't pay for itself. So Johnson Development, who was developing Sienna, and the City of Missouri City said, "We think it is justified."

Because we do, we're each going to put up \$1 million to guarantee the shortfall if there is a shortfall of revenue versus the expenditure." That never happened. It was profitable from the day it opened. We knew it wasn't a risk.

So now the Fort Bend Toll Road goes into Sienna and they are already talking about the next phase which will cross the Brazos River and connect to SH-99. It has to go through Thompsons. It's a very expensive project because of the wetlands issues, crossing the Brazos River. It will be very expensive to build that bridge.

But they are now talking about it because the Fort Bend Toll Road has been so successful. When they do connect it to SH-99, you have US-59 and SH-288 and the Fort Bend Toll Road is in between the two. So that will take pressure off of US-59 and SH-288 and now you have a direct shot from SH-99 all the way to the Medical Center and Houston. In the morning, US-59 takes you 2 hours to get to the Medical Center. So it's important for them to do that. They did the second phase into Sienna to Sienna Parkway. The next phase goes across the Brazos River, through Sienna, the back side of Riverstone, through Thompsons. The railroad crosses the river already and we have people who live in Sienna who apparently ride their 4-wheelers across the railroad bridge into Thompsons as it is. (laughter) At least Freddy tells me they come across it.

GOODSILL: What other departments should we talk about?

OWEN: We have the Legal Department and have a City Secretary who deals with all the legal issues that the City is involved in. We have Human Resources that does all the hiring and firing of our people. We have a Communications Department, and a Planning Department.

When developers come to the City, they bring their plans to the planners. The planners tell them what works and what does and doesn't work. We've talked about Police and Fire Departments, Public Works, Legal, Communications, Planning, City Secretary, Administration. I guess that's it.

BAUMGARTNER: Who is your rep on the Fort Bend Subsidence District?

OWEN: William Wallace.

GOODSILL: How does Fort Bend Subsidence District factor into Missouri City?

OWEN: All the cities of Fort Bend County are part of the Subsidence District. We each have representatives on the Board to make sure we're not being taken advantage of. This whole thing about subsidence is being questioned right now. Obviously there are a lot of people on one side who say there isn't subsidence and why are we creating all these surface water plants. The government is mandating that we convert from well water to surface water. That's what created those plants. Richmond and Rosenberg are fixing to do the same thing. Richmond is going to do a plant, like we did, but a smaller plant. That's a \$56 million facility that we have. Sugar Land's was almost \$90 million. That's part of a mandate from both the Subsidence District and the EPA, that any area that is this close to the Gulf Coast, may be causing subsidence when we pull water out of the ground.

Some of the studies show that subsidence in the county has dropped as much as seven feet over years. Some studies say it really hasn't. So there's a big issue there. We all look to the Subsidence District as the regulatory authority that dictates what we should and shouldn't do. Water is probably the most precious resource that we have today. It dictates development. If you don't have water, you can't develop. Ask Austin. Austin has restricted a lot of their development because of the lack of water. We in Fort Bend County are very fortunate in that water is not an issue. We're pulling water out of the Brazos River for the plant that we have. It's a partnership with all of the MUDs to do that and supply water. We had ten years to do that. Ten years ago we determined that there was going to be a need for us to have that plant in place.

GOODSILL: Speaking of water and the golf course, how do they water the golf course?

OWEN: They do it with effluent or gray water. Those waste water treatment plants have discharge lakes. I have one sitting right in the middle of the golf course. Because we're a municipality, I get the water free. And the MUD gets credit for using it for irrigation. So the only cost I have is to run the 3-75 horsepower pumps that pump the water.

GOODSILL: That's a pretty good deal for you!

OWEN: Yes, it is. These guys could not have done that. We have to have signs all along the course, 'Do Not Drink the Water'. The Environmental Protection Agency makes us put these signs out. Our permit through the State of Texas is to use 1,200,000 gallons of water per night to irrigate the golf course. But we only use 850,000 gallons when we DO use it.

GOODSILL: This is a pretty efficient arrangement.

OWEN: Yes, it is. If we didn't have that, it would cost us \$1,000,000 a year for that fresh water. Think about it. That water that's in that plant is flowing into Oyster Creek. The only other entity that is using that water is Dow Chemical because they own the water rights. The rest of the water is just flowing into the Gulf of Mexico. It's not doing anybody any good. Anyway, we got a permit to use 1,200,000 gallons a night. Since we weren't using that, last year during the drought, all of the lakes on the golf course were drying up, as they were everywhere else. I figured it was a pretty good time to go to the TCEQ, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and say, "Look, I have 22 lakes on the golf course that are all interconnected. If you'll let me pump gray water into those lakes, I can hold that water in those lakes. If we go through the same kind of a drought situation, I can pull that water out of those lakes and we don't run out of water."

So we got a permit from TCEQ this past year. It took me almost two years to get it. We now keep those lakes full with that excess water. We are not even using all the water allowed by our permit. When it rains we don't irrigate and that water is just being wasted.

GOODSILL: You might need to start using that water to water your right-of- ways.

OWEN: In the new subdivisions like Riverstone and Sienna, the developer put pipes along all of its right-of-ways to irrigate their esplanades with gray water.

BAUMGARTNER: Even Rosenberg and Richmond are starting to do that.

OWEN: Yes, they are laying that pipe right beside the fresh water pipe so when it comes time, they are able to hook that in to their wastewater treatment plant and water all their common areas and parks with gray water. Why not? It's not the water you would want to drink but it's not sewage. It's processed water.

BAUMGARTNER: They are having to drink it in Wichita Falls.

OWEN: I know. And I said, we're putting it in Oyster Creek and people are fishing in Oyster Creek. It's not bothering them. You don't have any signs along Oyster Creek saying not to drink that water. Where do you think that water came from? Stafford Run. It comes through the golf course from their treatment plant that they had to build.

We knew what our future total population would be, around 125,000 people.

GOODSILL: Is there a limit because of the way the city is configured?

OWEN: Yes. It is 29 square miles and we are surrounded by Stafford on one side, Sugar Land on one side, the Brazos River on one side, Pearland on one side. There are some new subdivisions going in along the toll road and there is part of Sienna. When Sienna is fully developed, there should be about 50,000 people living there.

GOODSILL: Do you think it will all stay in Missouri City?

OWEN: It has to. It's in our ETJ (Extraterritorial Jurisdiction). No one else can take it. When those MUDs start becoming self sufficient, we'll start taking them.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) is the legal ability of a government to exercise authority beyond its normal boundaries. Any authority can claim ETJ over any external territory they wish.

GOODSILL: I know cities are classified by size. In which category is 75,000 population?

OWEN: We're probably a medium city. We're not small and we're not large. I would think for large you'd have to be closer to 250,000-300,000.

GOODSILL: You have a confined space. Does the railroad factor into the story at all?

OWEN: Not other than the fact that it goes through Missouri City, and it was part of the reason Missouri City was established, and Stafford as well.

GOODSILL: How much of Missouri City is on the north side of the railroad tracks?

OWEN: A good amount of our industrial development is on the north side. When you cross the railroad track going toward Houston, Texas Parkway becomes Gessner. One of the oldest parts is Fondren Park and Fonmeadow, which is on the other side of Sam Houston Toll Road (Beltway 8). They are in Harris County but are Missouri City.

The children go to Houston Independent School District schools, but are in the City of Missouri City. When you go out Texas Parkway towards Blue Ridge, you have some of the City of Houston that is in Fort Bend County and has a Missouri City address. The people in Fondren Park vote in Harris County, City of Missouri City and Houston Independent School District elections.

The post office dictates the mailing address. Part of Riverstone is in Missouri City but they have a Sugar Land address. That's why the people in the City of Houston have a Missouri City address. They don't understand it when it comes to voting, but that's the way it is. The people in Fondren Park and Fonmeadow have a Houston address.

GOODSILL: How about the Brazos River? Does that factor in?

OWEN: Oh, yes. The Brazos River goes all the way through Sienna. There's a long-term plan for us to develop a lot of parkland along the Brazos River. We've preserved a lot of that area. As developers have gone in and built Sienna and Riverstone, we've had them set aside frontage along the Brazos River for parkland dedication. We're working with Sugar Land and other areas along the Brazos to continue to preserve that. Years ago, when Lee Duggan was the mayor of Sugar Land, he and I, with TPWD filming it, put a canoe in at the bridge right in Richmond and canoed all the way to Sienna. There were many places where we had to get out of the canoe and walk across sand bars.

TPWD used to use it all the time on their television show. There were areas where we canoed through concrete conduit. There are places literally as big of this room which we canoed through. There are cars in the river as well. I can take you down to the Brazos River not very far from here, before you get to US-59, and there are cars in the river. There are all kinds of stuff in the river.

GOODSILL: Which brings me to my next question. How about flooding?

OWEN: We have to watch the Brazos River, obviously, because everything from Missouri City flows into Oyster Creek and Mustang Bayou, which flow into the Brazos River. When the River gets as high as it was this last go-round, we begin to watch it. At 56 feet we would see some flooding in Missouri City.

GOODSILL: Is there anything you can do about it?

OWEN: Nothing. When the river fills up, the river fills up. Any large development today has to build detention ponds. But those ponds get full. Any time you have a 4 to 5 inch event you're going to get full, after three or four days of it. So the Brazos River backs up, Oyster Creek backs up, it gets out of its bank, but other than street flooding we do not having any flooding. What people don't understand is that streets are designed to flood and convey water to keep it out of homes.

GOODSILL: And if people will just stay in their houses instead of being on the road, they'll be okay.

OWEN: That's right. The streets are conduits. If we didn't have that, the water would be in the house. Just stay out of it and in about an hour, it's gone.

GOODSILL: Is the land in Missouri City uniformly the same kind of land?

OWEN: It basically is. It's black gumbo. Those were rice fields and cotton fields and it's flat. Sienna has a levee and everything in Sienna and Riverstone is behind the levee. It cost \$5 million for Sienna to build that levee to protect the homes.

Back in 1994-1995, right after I became mayor, I was in an airboat that we put in at Highway 6 and Oyster Creek and I went all the way to the Brazos River, across land. It was so interesting. You could tell where the gas pipelines were because they were bubbling. They leak. When you have that much movement in pipe, you are going to have some small leaks. I'm not talking about gushing up. You could see the bubbles. We were above the fence lines. So I've seen it flood.

GOODSILL: You told me a large percentage of the population of Missouri City is African-American. What's the rest of the breakdown?

OWEN: It is somewhere around 40% Caucasian and the rest is probably predominantly Asian. I don't have a lot of Hispanics. It's probably because of housing. Missouri City has won a lot of awards recently. We were voted the 3rd best city to live in, in the United States. The reason for that is the price of the homes and we were just voted the best place in Texas to own a home, price-wise. Diversity – Rice University said we were the most diverse city in the region. African-Americans in Missouri City are highly educated and they own their own homes, and they are families. Those are the things that make up the best city to live in. We go to the Texas Municipal League Conference at the end of this month and we'll get an award for Scenic City, the platinum award for being so scenic.

GOODSILL: Is there anything else about Missouri City that I haven't asked you?

OWEN: No. I think over the years what I have seen change the most is that we've gone from a rooftop community to a more diverse city, where we are beginning to get a fairly good amount of industrial/commercial growth to offset the tax burden on the property owners. You move that burden from the rooftops to other sources. The City of Sugar Land has been so successful because \$25 million a year in sales tax from First Colony Mall allows them to do a whole lot that I can't do. What is different about Missouri City from any other city in Fort Bend County, other than Katy which is part of Fort Bend County, is that one penny of our sales tax goes to Metro. So I don't get to use that penny for economic development.

You asked about the railroads. I'm going to get commuter rail from Metro Houston's Fannin plant to Missouri City one of these days, hopefully.

GOODSILL: Do you think it will stop at Missouri City?

OWEN: It has to because there is no other city in Fort Bend who is a member of Metro. Otherwise they have to join Metro or pay like Dallas does. That's our big push right now, to try to get commuter rail. Leonard Scarcella, Mayor of Stafford, wants to bring it all the way into Stafford and he's willing to pay his part to do it. I would love to see it go all the way to US-59 and 90A.

Transportation, water, trying to keep up with the growth – those are our biggest challenges. Keeping enough police officers, building enough fire stations, the infrastructure part of it.

GOODSILL: And keeping up as the city ages.

OWEN: Those are our biggest challenges. You can't stop the growth.

GOODSILL: Well, you can. Your city IS going to stop.

OWEN: I claim that the city is the school district's worst enemy because we can't stop the growth and they can't build schools fast enough. So they are burdened with the school buses. They'd like to see us curtail our growth but I can't go to a developer who owns all this land and tell him I don't want him to build any more houses. We can't control that. We have to make sure that they are providing sites for schools, knowing that there is going to be a need for an elementary school and probably a middle school in that area.

There are a whole lot of things and that's why we adopted "The Show Me City" as our motto. Which is patented by the way. As a matter of fact, the congressman from Missouri was just in Missouri City a couple of months ago with Al Green and we laughed about the fact that a congressman from Missouri had come to Missouri City, come to the 'Show Me City' from the "Show Me State". It's amazing that no one had ever copyrighted that logo, not even in Missouri.

When we do the survey of our citizens asking what is most important to them as a community, parks is always rated as the number one reason to move to Missouri City. That's why we spend so much money maintaining them, and make sure that we can do that zoning. As these new subdivisions are being built, we have a requirement that so many acres be set aside for parks, as a percentage of their total development.

If they are so small that they can't put a park in, they have to put cash in lieu of the land into a park that is adjacent to them. A lot of times the developer would put up money in lieu of putting in a park. Then that money goes into the existing park to help maintain it. I spend \$1.9 million a year maintaining parks, excluding the golf course. I get nothing out of them except the happiness of the citizenry. It goes back to the golf course. When we took the golf course over, there were 100 houses for sale in Quail Valley at \$57 a square foot. We just got our tax rolls two weeks ago, and across the board, the property values in Missouri City rose 14.5%. In Quail Valley alone today, it would be hard to find 15 houses for sale. They are selling in 24 hours. Realtors are not taking contracts, but bids on them and people are offering more than the asking price.

Recently one sold for \$152 a square foot. The average price now is about \$87 per square foot. So that's why that golf course was important. People want to talk about how much money we spent to do it. I try to say, "You know, guys, let me put it this way: The city is a pair of pants. If I'm losing \$1 million over here on this golf course and making \$1.5 million on property values over here, what's the difference? It's just a different pocket." But that's the way people operate.

Interview ends