

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSIONER
ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Charles Kalkomey, Sr.**
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City of Rosenberg*

BAUMGARTNER: Today is July 6th, 2021. My name is Karl Baumgartner and I am conducting an oral history interview with Charles Kalkomey at 1925 First Street, Rosenberg, Texas. This interview is being conducted on behalf of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission's Oral History Project. Charles has been serving the City of Rosenberg as City Engineer since 1994, and he has the longest tenure of current city officials. Charles was born in Rosenberg and he and his wife Beatrice and their family are lifelong residents of the area.

Charles, what is your full legal name?

KALKOMEY: Charles Allen Kalkomey, Senior.

BAUMGARTNER: And your date of your birth?

KALKOMEY: December 18th, 1951. I was born right down the road at Polly Ryon Hospital.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, you were born in Rosenberg? Why did I think that you were from Needville or the Sealy area?

KALKOMEY: Well, I've now lived in the Sealy area for almost forty years. But I grew up here and worked here all my life.

BAUMGARTNER: What were your mom and dad's names?

KALKOMEY: Dad's name was Charlie...

BAUMGARTNER: And Charlie is his legal name?

KALKOMEY: Yes. His father, my granddad, was also named Charlie so my dad was actually a junior. People assume that I was, but Dad's name was Charlie and mine is Charles.

Dad grew up in the Rosenberg area also; he was born here in 1921.

BAUMGARTNER: When did the Kalkomeys move to the Texas area?

KALKOMEY: Part of the family supposedly came from New York state, but his three brothers were all born here. One of them lived in Needville. one of them lived in LaMarque and Nacogdoches for most of his life, and the younger one moved to Arkansas.

BAUMGARTNER: So, your granddad was likely born in Texas?

KALKOMEY: He died before I was born so I never knew him. I understand he was working for the city of Rosenberg at the time he passed away.

BAUMGARTNER: Must be a family trait. And what about your mom's side. What was her name?

KALKOMEY: Mom's name is LaNelle. She was a Dujka out of Orchard. Her family were all part of the farming community in the Orchard area. She is kin to the Dujka brothers, a well-known family there; she still has farm property there in Orchard.

BAUMGARTNER: How did your mom and dad meet?

KALKOMEY: Dad was working for a local firm SA Russell and Associates; they were surveyors and engineers and dad was working on the surveying side. She took a job as a secretary for SA Russell and Associates, and there she met Dad.

BAUMGARTNER: So, you have family history in your career background of surveying. And you grew up here in Rosenberg?

KALKOMEY: We lived at 1621 Carlisle, which is a block away from Robert E Lee Elementary on Highway 36 which was the oldest remaining elementary school in Rosenberg. It is currently being torn down and converted to an alternative learning center. I went to Robert E. Lee for four years, and then went to Bowie Elementary in fifth grade because halfway through the year we moved out to Band Road south of town out by the fairgrounds.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh really. Bowie, that was almost new then, and Band Road was out in the country in the 50's.

KALKOMEY: I think Bowie was brand new at the time.

BAUMGARTNER: And so, you ended up going to Lamar.

KALKOMEY: I went to Lamar High School and graduated in 1970.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have siblings?

KALKOMEY: I have a brother and a sister. I'm the oldest, my sister Carol is four years younger and my brother Chris is fifteen years younger.

BAUMGARTNER: Have they remained in the Fort Bend County area?

KALKOMEY: Over the years I worked much of the time with my dad in surveying and engineering, and we ultimately operated our own businesses. Chris had moved out of state to Pittsburg for a while and during that period Dad developed an infection from an old accident which limited his work. Thankfully Chris returned home to work with Dad on the surveying side of the business; Carol, who had been living in Mississippi for a while, returned and it has worked out well. Chris and Carol both live here in the area.

BAUMGARTNER: So, when you were growing up, you started gaining work experience with summer jobs in the-surveying business. Didn't you start working with your dad?

KALKOMEY: I did; ever since I was probably 12 or 13, I worked with him to some extent.

BAUMGARTNER: So, you really learned from the ground floor in the old days?

KALKOMEY: I did. I worked with him a little bit on weekends and throughout high school I worked all summer long with him.

BAUMGARTNER: What was the work like?

KALKOMEY: It has changed. It was a lot more labor intensive then. I remember dragging a 100-foot, 200-foot chain through rice fields, down the roads and across corn fields and cotton fields, trying to do a survey.

BAUMGARTNER: Your dad Charlie was very well known in Rosenberg. It was my impression that he was probably the best-known surveyor around the area.

KALKOMEY: He was employed by S.A. Russell and Associates, Surveyors and Engineers, for many years right here in Rosenberg. Their office was at the corner of Frost Street and Avenue I in the building that still sits there today. Later he started his own surveying company.

BAUMGARTNER: What's the difference between a surveyor and an engineer?

KALKOMEY: Surveyors are charged with retracing or following the footsteps of the

original surveyor. They make precise measurements of the land and document the evidence found on the ground such as corner monuments, fences, conflicts between deeds and occupation and use of the land, etc.

If there is a problem with the boundaries of a tract of land, the surveyor doesn't establish boundaries; courts do that. The surveyor is following the footsteps of the original surveyor and identifies what the land looks like, what's on the ground and what's represented by lines that he found and ran.

A civil engineer like me is more of a planner and designer. We plan and design water lines, sanitary sewer lines, drainage, roads, water and sewer plants, bridges, etc. Of course, there are many types of engineers – structural, mechanical, chemical, environmental, electrical, transportation, etc. Each have their own area of expertise.

BAUMGARTNER: How did your dad become a surveyor? Did they have surveyor schools?

KALKOMEY: No, I don't think so. He was in World War II. After the war he returned here and worked some local jobs, Rude and Sons Sporting Goods on Third Street for a while. He took a correspondence course on surveying from a school out of Chicago, I believe. He went and took his state exam for his surveyor's license and passed it. He did it all through correspondence courses.

Surveying had changed a lot since the old days. When I was in high school, I started out on the tail end of a chain and then I graduated to the front end of the chain. Or I could run the instrument too, but that was a boring job.

BAUMGARTNER: So how many people were on a surveying crew then?

KALKOMEY: What I remember is most of the time there were four. You had an instrument man, two chain men, one on the front and one on the back. And then you would have somebody running the show, which was Dad.

BAUMGARTNER: So, surveying has changed dramatically since your dad got into it.

KALKOMEY: Yes, it has. Techniques have changed very dramatically.

BAUMGARTNER: They didn't even have GPS in those days, did they?

KALKOMEY: No. You could do it now with one person with a GPS unit. One person can go

out with modern technology and do a survey and accomplish the same thing.

BAUMGARTNER: Franklin Schodek used tell me that initially he could hire people really easily and you could put together a survey staff which was easily taught. And as the years went by, he and his partner, James would be griping that they hadn't seen anybody come into their office in 17 years applying for a job surveying.

KALKOMEY: It became harder to find people who wanted to work. Dad said you could always find somebody. If they were from Needville or they were from Orchard or they were from someplace outside the city, they'd be willing to work for a summer. We had a lot of good people who worked for us for a summer, before they moved on. B.J. Thomas was one of them, but he didn't like the physical work.

BAUMGARTNER: The singer? No, that doesn't sound like his cup of tea.

KALKOMEY: And today, now you've got to find somebody that's sharp enough to pick up the details of using the GPS equipment. It requires a better educational background than what we needed before to drag a chain.

BAUMGARTNER: What was your dad like? I always heard he was a really nice man. I think I heard that more than anything else.

KALKOMEY: I think he was a very fair businessman. He was too nice at times when it came to what he charged for surveys. I have no complaints growing up and working for him as his son. I think a lot of people liked him. He was quite active in the Presbyterian Church here in town. He was a good dad.

BAUMGARTNER: He worked right up to the end, didn't he?

KALKOMEY: He did. He was working until about 30 days before he passed away in 2006.

TEXAS A & M UNIVERSITY

BAUMGARTNER: What did you do following high school graduation?

KALKOMEY: Started college at Texas A & M. September, 1970.

BAUMGARTNER: Academically, would you say A & M was pretty tough in those days? Was a lot of studying required?

KALKOMEY: I don't remember. I played a lot of dominoes [laughter].

BAUMGARTNER: Well, I mean it couldn't have been just real bad or your recollection would be strained.

KALKOMEY: I remember some late nights and that kind of thing but it wasn't an overwhelming burden. Physics was okay as best I remember. Thermodynamics was a bit of a challenge, but for the most part, the math and engineering came rather easily.

BAUMGARTNER: What was your major?

KALKOMEY: My degree is Bachelor Science in Civil Engineering.

BAUMGARTNER: Okay. Did you have an idea for your plans, what you wanted to do? Your dad was a surveyor.

KALKOMEY: Well, I knew what I wanted to do from about the seventh grade.

BAUMGARTNER: Really. Which was what?

KALKOMEY: I always wanted to do the same thing Dad was doing, but on the engineering side of the work; work for the smaller cities and do engineering work for them. In the early days of his career Dad worked for Rosenberg, Alvin, Sweeny, Brazoria, West Columbia and Damon. I always wanted to do the same thing on the engineering side: Work for the cities and do engineering work for them.

BAUMGARTNER: When you were in college did you find summer jobs that tied in?

KALKOMEY: I worked with Dad over the summer when I came home, and worked over Christmas breaks that first year in college.

After I graduated from Texas A&M, Dad was doing a lot of surveying for another engineering company, Langford Engineering in Houston; they were doing a lot of water and sewer line work in Baytown and Mont Belvieu.

Basically, every morning that summer, I took about three guys and we went to Mont Belvieu and Baytown and we stacked and laid out water and sewer lines, lift stations, that kind of work. I worked there through that summer and later I convinced Ivan Langford of Langford Engineering to hire me as an engineer and I went to work for him. Langford was

an engineer in Houston out on the Katy Freeway next to the Memorial City Mall.

BAUMGARTNER: Were you a good student at A & M?

KALKOMEY: Graduated Summa Cum Laude.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, really? Wow. That's pretty impressive.

KALKOMEY: My wife, Beatrice and I were married in January, 1972, midway through my sophomore year. I remember I had to get a note from my mother saying I was getting married so that the school would let me live off campus [laughter]. It was tough to get permission to live off campus.

I took a job with a surveying and engineering company in College Station and worked for them during the week. I put in 15 to 20 hours a week working. And then during the summers there I spent working with them.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, really? Was that hard to hold down a job and do your classwork?

KALKOMEY: No, it worked out.

BAUMGARTNER: So, you graduated in 1974?

KALKOMEY: Yes, and in September of '74 I went to work for Langford Engineering. I worked for him through 1977, and then came home and worked with Dad. Dad had gone into business for himself in 1970.

BAUMGARTNER: That was the same year you left home for College Station. Was that a sheer coincidence? Was he ready then to go into business or did that create the impetus?

KALKOMEY: In 1970 when I went to A&M it never struck me till later on in life that he maybe took that big risk to start his own business at the same time as I was starting college. But I don't know that it was a factor that played in the decision. I think he was just ready.

BAUMGARTNER: Now or never. But evidently it has worked out good.



Beatrice and Charles Kalkomey

So, then you worked for your dad, and then you went into business for yourself in the early 80s.

KALKOMEY: Yes. I received my engineering license in 1979 and started my own business in 1980-1981. I found some work with some smaller cities and we did a lot of subdivision work, and rural type subdivisions.

Dad had worked for Brookshire Katy Drainage District when it was created in '61. I went to work for Brookshire Katy Drainage District around 1984 and have worked with them ever since.

HIRED AS CITY ENGINEER

In 1994 I was hired as the City Engineer. I became City Engineer by contract; wasn't a city employee.

BAUMGARTNER: And that's still the structure that the city operates under, right?

KALKOMEY: Yes, I'm still under contract. They hired the firm I work for now, Jones and Carter Engineering. I represent Jones and Carter as the city engineer.

BAUMGARTNER: And you had the same structure when you were on your own, representing the city as the City Engineer.

KALKOMEY: I basically did the same thing. My firm was hired and I represented the firm.

BAUMGARTNER: How long have you been city engineer?

KALKOMEY: Except for about a year and a half, it's been since 1994.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow. That's a long time. You've seen a lot of water under the bridge.

KALKOMEY: Yes. I know where most of the details are.

BAUMGARTNER: Where they are buried (laughs). But during that period, it hasn't been your style to thrust yourself into the limelight a whole lot. You've always been around as stuff was going on, kind of in the background but always there.

In 1994, initially who were you working with mostly within the city administration?

KALKOMEY: Most of my work then I remember was with Don Meyer, Director of Public Works.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, yeah, Don. He operated kind of like Assistant City Manager then too. Today don't you mostly deal with the City Manager or Mayor?

KALKOMEY: Back then, David Neely was city manager for a long time. I remember working with Clarence Wolfe and Fritz Oberhoff; Wolfe was over water and sewer and Oberhoff was over streets and drainage.

BAUMGARTNER: During that time frame with the city, did you interact as heavily then with city office personnel? It seems to me like you're busy all the time now with city administrators.

KALKOMEY: It grew more by the early 2000s. I was pretty much dealing with every part of the city and the city manager's office and city attorney. We started getting the MUDS come in and try to establish themselves in 2000 and 2003. And there's been a lot of city annexations going on.

BAUMGARTNER: MUDS (Municipal Water Districts) are used by developers who want to subdivide a property and sell lots. They create entities (MUDS) to provide funding for bringing in utilities and all the infrastructure needed for the development and work with the municipality to arrange it.

KALKOMEY: It was a different way of doing business and created some additional work for the city. It's been an explosion for the city from a population and economy standpoint.

BAUMGARTNER: My impression is that Rosenberg has almost always had competent and conscientious city government. Except for some minor lapses, city council and the city administration has always tried to do their jobs and represent the public's interest. I have lived here over 40 years now and going all the way back, the mayors have been conscientious--Ben Babovec, Dorothy Ryan, Joe Gurecky, Vincent Morales, to name some examples. Lupe Uresti, the City's first female mayor and first Hispanic mayor, was a very competent civic leader. City Hall and the Police Department have always been responsible. Long-term police chief Robert Gracia was a commendable and reliable city leader who stepped up as Mayor Pro Tem several times.

Charles, how would you characterize your interaction with the mayors?

KALKOMEY: My tenure started around Dorothy Ryan's term, but I didn't have a great deal of interaction with Mayor Ryan. I never had any issues with her. She was always straightforward, and we seem to get along well.

BAUMGARTNER: Yes, born and raised here, she knew the city well. Her son Martin and wife Peggy and daughter Beverly have grown up and remained here, active in local activities.

KALKOMEY: I had a lot of interaction with Joe Gurecky.

BAUMGARTNER: Yep, that's Joe's way.

KALKOMEY: Just his way, hands on. And Vincent Morales was good to work with too. We had a good productive relationship. I felt like they could call me whenever they had questions or needed something. If I didn't have a good, clean understanding what I thought the city was asking for, I could talk to them easily.

BAUMGARTNER: How would the more active mayors get involved with the city engineer?

KALKOMEY: Well, they were a part of the meetings we had with the developers of major city projects. One of the big things we did during that era was to get the frontage roads built along US 59 between Highway 36 and FM 2218.

BAUMGARTNER: So, what's happened to Rosenberg in the last 30 years? You've been city engineer almost 30 years now!

KALKOMEY: It's not the same place.

BAUMGARTNER: In what respects?

KALKOMEY: Almost anything you want to talk about. Traffic, size, population growth, the demands on the city, infrastructure, changes in our water supply...

We had to change to 30 percent surface water here a few years ago and reduce reliance on the City's groundwater wells.

BAUMGARTNER: Yes. The Fort Bend Subsidence District imposed that requirement on all Fort Bend County municipalities.

KALKOMEY: And we're looking at a potential change to upping that to 60 percent in 2025. Those issues are different, and major.

BAUMGARTNER: The city has done pretty well, actually, hasn't it?

KALKOMEY: It has. The sales tax base is tremendous compared to what it was not many years ago. And it is what has kept the property taxes down.

BAUMGARTNER: I remember lots of folks complaining when we were debating putting in the new mall out on the Freeway. They weren't considering the growth Rosenberg was facing from Houston's inevitable expansion -- where was our money supposed to come from?

KALKOMEY: Yes. It's made a big difference in things with the mall and all the housing and related growth. Still need a grocery store somewhere on the southwest side of the city. We miss the old Kmart grocery store.

BAUMGARTNER: Yes, it's interesting to talk with old timers like Franklin Schodek, Maxine Phelan, Benny Wleczyk... They talk about all the little stores down around Third Street supporting the area when all of this was a different era.

KALKOMEY: Oh, Cole Theater, Ben Franklin, Blaze's, RB Department Store, First National Bank, Etta Mae's. I remember a lot of that. Barbershop, Old Schaeffer's Pharmacy.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh yes, Mr. Wertheimer was owner of Schaeffer's Pharmacy.

KALKOMEY: Henry Wertheimer, on the Lamar Consolidated School Board for years. My wife was a nurse and she worked for a GP here in town, Dr. Fred Beavers. We would always run into Mr. Wertheimer and he would treat us right on prescriptions.

BAUMGARTNER: He was just such a genuinely nice person. He was president of LCISD for eight years. After he passed, they named a school for him which I thought was great because a lot of times people like him who really contribute don't get the recognition.

Don't you have to spend a lot of time today, maybe now more than in the old days, with developers and proposed projects they want to get done?

KALKOMEY: I look at everything that comes across the city's desk from the standpoint of development plans and drawings.

BAUMGARTNER: I mean, that's a big part of your time, I would think.

KALKOMEY: It is.

BAUMGARTNER: Especially with everything that's going on today. Is it still booming?

KALKOMEY: Yes, it hasn't slowed down any. We've got three new MUDS that are trying to get off the ground, on the southwest side of town. It has jumped from the other side of town now, the southeast side, to the southwest.

BAUMGARTNER: What kind of requirements do you currently have for overseeing city activity?

KALKOMEY: Well, right now, we're approving drawings and development and we're doing inspections in the field of the roads. the water, sewer and drainage that go in. To try to make sure the contractors put it in right. We can't catch everything but try to put some eyes there that to make sure that contractors are adhering to the regulations.

BAUMGARTNER: What is big on the horizon?

KALKOMEY: Getting I-69 completed. This is going to be good for us.

BAUMGARTNER: You mean out towards Kendleton?

KALKOMEY: All the way through this portion of Fort Bend County.

SUBSIDENCE ISSUE

Of course, the big challenge looking at us is the potential additional surface water Conversion in 2025, increasing the surface water usage from 30% to 60% of total water usage.

BAUMGARTNER: And what's that going to require from the city?

KALKOMEY: Some extensions of some large diameter water lines to make sure the water can get to other parts of town.

BAUMGARTNER: Of course, that's an example of an infrastructure requirement critical to the city which most residents aren't aware of but you guys are planning for.

We will still be getting our water from the Brazosport Water Authority to comply with the new subsidence district mandates. That turned out to be a good deal?

Editor's Note: [Click this link for more on the Brazosport Water Authority.](#)

KALKOMEY: It has. We've had some glitches, which I guess is only normal.

BAUMGARTNER: As you know, Charles, for five years I was an appointee to the Richmond/Rosenberg Local Government Corporation and then five years serving on the Fort Bend Subsidence District, involved in the planning of the area's water availability issues. What happened to the plan whereby the two cities were going to joint venture the construction of a water plant to provide surface water?

Editor's Note: [Click this link for more on the Fort Bend Subsidence District.](#)

KALKOMEY: The economics didn't turn out to look as favorable as going this way with the Brazosport Water Authority. The cost of the water was going to be higher to the consumer by trying to build our own plant.

BAUMGARTNER: It would have been more costly than what with Brazosport Water Authority?

KALKOMEY: Yes. The Water Authority was taking and spreading out the costs over the other seven or eight cities that they supply water to, whereas Richmond and Rosenberg together would have been cost-sharing between just the two of us. It ended up just a matter of a larger number of participants to spread that cost.

BAUMGARTNER: Richmond went ahead and constructed its own plant. It's actually worked out OK for both municipalities Richmond and Rosenberg?

KALKOMEY: I think so. We are still concerned by the fact that Katy is seeing so much subsidence and there's not enough being done about that. Portions of Katy closer to Fort Bend County have the highest subsidence rate in the district and is not being converted To surface water.

BAUMGARTNER: They are buying their water from Houston, aren't they?

KALKOMEY: It comes from North Fort Bend Water Authority. But there is that section of development up there still pumping wells that hasn't been converted according to the regulations.

Editor's Note: [Click this link for more information on the North Fort Bend Water Authority.](#)

BAUMGARTNER: I thought they were ahead of the curve by lining up water out of Houston.

KALKOMEY: Well, they are, but they haven't gotten water to that particular area yet so they continue to pump groundwater. And here Rosenberg and Richmond have basically stopped any subsidence. It's not occurring to any degree that you can measure. I kind of wonder about the accuracy of the measurements that are taken on these stations. When you're talking about subsidence of a quarter of an inch or less, it just basically disappeared in this part of the county.

BAUMGARTNER: So, how do you respond to people who are saying why are we spending all this money on subsidence when 10 years of subsidence is two inches?

KALKOMEY: Good question and the answer is because the regulations are required. The Subsidence District is working on the numbers for 2025. I think there will be a lot of questioning those numbers and, is there really a need to convert to 60 percent in 2025 based on this subsidence we're seeing.

BAUMGARTNER: The leadership at the Fort Bend Subsidence District is experienced and dedicated and data-oriented, and their position has been that the data indicate precautionary regulations are necessary for long-term protection of Fort Bend County residents. The problem with subsidence is that, once begun, it can be irreversible.

KALKOMEY: Yes, you can certainly see, you know, what was happening in Harris County there on the ship channel. It was obvious with the Jersey Village experience. It is obvious that they certainly arrested subsidence there with their regulations.

But we're beginning to think, is there really a need for further conversion out west here? Based on what we're seeing, the subsidence are almost nothing.

I think that's the big question, is there a need to further convert to 60% reliance on surface

water or do we push the change off from 2025 to 2030 or 2028 and take a look at it again later.

BAUMGARTNER: Perhaps there may be consideration of delaying some actions to a few years past 2025 to take a look at it.

KALKOMEY: I think that would be wise.

CITY GROWTH

BAUMGARTNER: What is the near-term growth outlook for the city?

KALKOMEY: It is going to continue to grow. Housing seems not be slowing down. Everybody is scraping around looking for property to build more houses on. We've got some mobility projects that we're working on and the county is working to help move the people around from place to place. There is potentially going to be a big bottleneck if we don't have the roads in place to move the people.

BAUMGARTNER: What's the big Epicenter project that they're doing out here off the freeway at Bamore?

KALKOMEY: It's an entertainment venue. It'll be a place for public gatherings, graduations, concerts, for speaking engagements, County Fair and similar events. Perhaps it will be used like the Merrill Center in Katy.

BAUMGARTNER: It'll be on the south side of the freeway?

KALKOMEY: South side of the freeway, right there on the corner of Bamore and I-69. Some investors are part of this, it's a public/private investment. At times it will produce a lot of traffic, and so there are road improvements that are being planned. It's not going to be an everyday occurrence that you see a congestion of traffic from 10,000 people, but in those rare occasions you could see law enforcement assisting in directing traffic.

BAUMGARTNER: Going south, between here and Needville, is that going to end up solid housing one of these days?

KALKOMEY: It will. There are floodplain issues in the Pleak area and down south. Utilities are available and developers are beginning to look at the area. We now have Dollar Tree and its big distribution facility down off Spur 10. Things are continuing

to grow. They are not slowing down.

Towards Katy, we have Amazon, Costco, Ross Dress for Less that have built huge distribution facilities there. One company built three spec warehouse buildings. They sat vacant for six months and I began to worry about it; the buildings are occupied now and they are building six more.

BAUMGARTNER: What about to the West of Rosenberg? Rosenberg is bursting at the seams.

KALKOMEY: It's jumped from the Sugar Land side of town to the Beasley side of town, and it's still happening. There's a big development plan all the way out almost to where the train yard is at Kendleton. Right at the outer limits of our ETJ, there are plans for 900 acres of homes.

BAUMGARTNER: Really? What's all the highway construction at that intersection going across the highway?

KALKOMEY: That is to get access to that intermodal facility so traffic can get off the freeway and into the site where all the product is and then trucks can get back on the freeway.

BAUMGARTNER: What does intermodal mean?

KALKOMEY: It's where they bring in product by train and unload it, such as vehicles and freight containers. They put it on trucks and ship it out. It's a transfer point. I'm told somebody bought Kansas City Southern railroad.

BAUMGARTNER: I think that deal fell through. Maybe one of the bidders lost it and someone else got it. It's been in the Wall Street Journal for a number of months.

FRYDEK, LIFE IN THE COUNTRY

BAUMGARTNER: And what else north of the Rosenberg area? You've been in the middle of a growth era here and witnessed a lot of a growth.

KALKOMEY: Well, I moved away in 1981 out towards Frydek and Sealy, but I still worked here and I continue to do so. I'm in a little area that's incorporated called Brazos Country.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, I didn't know that. Why did you move to Frydek?

Editor's Note: For more on Brazos Country, [click this link](#).

KALKOMEY: Rosenberg got too big (laughter). I grew up on Band Road, and I wanted spaces for my kids to play and I guess I wanted somewhat of that same open atmosphere or the children. So, I just chose to move out to somewhere into the country.

BAUMGARTNER: When were your children born?

KALKOMEY: Allen was born in 1977 and we moved there in 1981. Craig was born a year after we moved.

BAUMGARTNER: So, you already had some little ones. Was Frydek big enough to be considered a town?

KALKOMEY: No. I'm outside of what we call the Frydek Community. I'm on the Brazos River side of that, so it wasn't a town at that time. We lived in a subdivision that was known as Brazos Country that was incorporated around 1980.

I was elected Mayor in 2001 and served as Mayor for the next 18 years, from 2001 to 2019.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow, I didn't realize that. What was that like?

KALKOMEY: It was fun and it was interesting. I no sooner got into office and we got hit with 24 permit applications to drill wells in the subdivision. And so, we fought that for a few years. And finally, after a while got things settled.

BAUMGARTNER: Were you able to create enough resistance to suspend it or limit it?

KALKOMEY: We got it to where they didn't drill any wells within the actual developed subdivision area. They stayed outside of that area.

BAUMGARTNER: Was it considered then a subdivision or a municipality?

KALKOMEY: It was a municipality at that time. So, we had ordinance making powers, the ability to create ordinances.

BAUMGARTNER: How often were elections?

KALKOMEY: Every two years.

BAUMGARTNER: Two years-- were you like Hilmar Moore? In sixty years of office, he never had to put up a sign for re-election.

KALKOMEY: I never had to put up a sign either. Never was opposed. Nobody wanted my position (laughter).

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have city Council? I'm sure you didn't have the ridiculous city council battles that they started having in Rosenberg City Council.

KALKOMEY: We had a meeting once a month.

BAUMGARTNER: And you enjoyed it?

KALKOMEY: Yes.

BAUMGARTNER: Why did you never run for office in Rosenberg?

KALKOMEY: I moved away in '81, when I was 30, so I never had an opportunity to look for anything over here. Plus, as you knew, you have to live within the city limits to run for elected office in Rosenberg.

BAUMGARTNER: Was serving as mayor instructive as far as learning how to run a city? Did it give you insights into managing Rosenberg?

KALKOMEY: Kind of the other way around. I think being around other cities previously, not only Rosenberg but dealing with some other cities as well, I developed an understanding of how cities work. What their limitations were, what they could do and what they couldn't do. So, it was me more bringing that to the council meetings at Brazos Country.

BAUMGARTNER: And it was a good place for kids to grow up I would think, your children.

KALKOMEY: Yeah. You never know how things will fall out. Allen played on two of the state 3A football Championship teams.

BAUMGARTNER: Really, how neat.

KALKOMEY: And Craig, we discovered his senior year he could sing. His girlfriend, Gwen, now his wife, got him to try out for a play and it was a musical. He got the lead role, and that carried over to when he went to A&M. He joined the singing cadets and got to carry over his singing there.

BAUMGARTNER: Growing up, where did the boys go to school?

KALKOMEY: They went to Sealy schools. It was 9 miles from my house to the school.

BAUMGARTNER: That's a pretty good environment to grow up in.

KALKOMEY: It seemed like when I was growing up, you had people around you who knew you and you couldn't really get out of line or somebody would see you. You would be in an area where somebody else, whether it was a person from Church or a person you knew, would see you. It was the same way in the Sealy area at that time. When the kids were in high school, we had enough people and friends around that if they were someplace, they weren't supposed to be, somebody saw them.

BAUMGARTNER: Are the boys still in the area?

KALKOMEY: Allen and Stephanie live in Weston Lake and Craig and Gwen are in Long Meadow Farms off of 99 and West Belfort. We have four grandchildren.

BAUMGARTNER: That's good. Is the Sealy area growing?

KALKOMEY: Sealy is seeing some growth and development, once you get out to the west and north side, but it hasn't really boomed.

This has been an interesting ride through Rosenberg, through all these years, to see how things have changed, where things used to be and where they are not anymore.

BAUMGARTNER: Yeah, I remember when I moved here, the Southwest Freeway ended at Highway 6, and you jogged over one mile and continued in on 90. My first night here, I stayed at Homer Norton's Motel on Avenue H. I used to have lunch every day at Howard's Cafeteria on Third Street next to Leon Danziger's shoe store.

CITY ENGINEER RESPONSIBILITIES

BAUMGARTNER: The city has grown and changed so much. How does it happen and how is it affected by or related to planning and what role in planning does the city engineer have with the way a city grows? How does the population grow from 20 ,000 to 40,000 over a period of thirty years?

KALKOMEY: Rosenberg was a pretty sleepy town. Going back to when the growth started, we saw in the 70s and 80s where people that had large tracts of land started subdividing. The first one I remember was Cambridge Village; that was Bob Lindsey. Then you had Dean Leaman and his son Lee, who developed Freeway Manor and Greenwood.

BAUMGARTNER: So that's when Rosenberg kind of started to grow.

KALKOMEY: Started to grow and we had more people moving in and began to expand, and things began to change as we entered the 70's and 80's and approached the turn of the century.

BAUMGARTNER: The 80s was a very weak economic environment.

KALKOMEY: Inflation got really bad. A lot of engineering companies were geared to development and got their financing through the energy industry. They laid off a bunch of people and a good number went under in that era. I left my own practice and in 1987 went to work for another firm in Houston for about a year and a half because things had gotten so slow.

BAUMGARTNER: I remember. We took our company motto from the oil industry: "Without a fix in '86, it's Chapter 11 in '87."

KALKOMEY: Dad still had his license and his surveying company. Other than cities inspecting and approving things, there wasn't any city participation. But we were always looking at thoroughfare routes and analyzing which roads would need to be extended.

One of the first ones that was built, which everybody wondered about, was the extension of Reading Road from US 59 out to FM2977. Out through the middle of nowhere, we built this huge road. City leaders Joe Gurecky and Councilman Carl Hopkins pushed it.

So, we had to focus on planning for that, and then water plants, and what kind of lines did we need to plan to connect the system together, and the same thing with the extension of

sewer plants, and where would the next one be, etc.

BAUMGARTNER: The major infrastructure for utilities. The average resident is barely cognizant of all the activity required by city administrators. And what happened when the big new mall, Brazos Town Center, was finished? How did that affect the world?

KALKOMEY: Changed the landscape tremendously, in my opinion. And there's a lot of people who think we made excessive concessions to the developer, but the project returned so much.

BAUMGARTNER: That's what I mean. There was a lot of criticism that the city didn't need it and so forth, but good grief, look at the tax revenue that it has generated for the city.

KALKOMEY: That tax revenue and the housing that's come with it. All these surrounding housing projects. The city has lowered their tax rate now for a number of years, consecutively. And part of that is because the sales taxes revenue kept growing.



Charles A. Kalkomey, Rosenberg operations manager, left, and Rosenberg City Councilwoman Amanda Barta look at the detail of the off and on ramps for the proposed redesign of Reading Road and FM 762.

(Photo from The Houston Chronicle, January 28, 2014)

BAUMGARTNER: How was the city impacted as far as city personnel having to expand their functions?

KALKOMEY: Planning was required for all that and making sure that things were built and could be expanded and used for other purposes. Water systems were added and we built networks of transmission lines so that we could get the water moved around town without much difficulty. Especially since the new subsidence regulations dictated it.

With respect to overall city staff, it put some stress on the planning group, the permitting group, the public works group, the guys who go out and fix the leaks. You think about the restaurants and the food establishment. You had to have a code enforcement person that checks all that from a health standpoint.

BAUMGARTNER: And hasn't it worked out very well? KALKOMEY: I think so. I think it has worked well.

BAUMGARTNER: What is the Planning Commission do in connection with the projects in the city, large and small?

KALKOMEY: They are involved from a platting standpoint to make sure the planning rules are followed and regulations are adhered to. For instance, today's subdivision ordinance requires all lots to be 60-feet by 120-feet. Developers will come in and they want some 55-foot lots, or some 50-foot lots. So, a development agreement could be created that allows the developer to do that in exchange for a commitment to put more masonry on the buildings, or build more park space or something like that. The city relaxes the rules a little bit, but they get something in exchange for the people that are there.

Editor's Note: [Click this link for more information on the Rosenberg Planning Commission.](#)

BAUMGARTNER: How many citizens are on the planning Commission. Half a dozen?

KALKOMEY: Yes, six or seven.

BAUMGARTNER: What do they do and how well qualified are they?

KALKOMEY: They have a sincere desire to make Rosenberg better. They have their own different ideas sometimes as to what that means and how you do that. And so, they do

have some votes that are not unanimous.

Their primary task is to make sure that what comes before them meets the regulations and requirements of the City. And as long as the developer has met the rules, you can't deny them just because you don't like what's going to be built there. Sometimes that becomes an education process for the city staff to explain to the Planning Commission members.

Of course, there's still a group of people who would like to have zoning in Rosenberg. That is a whole other issue.

BAUMGARTNER: That desire has been out of the limelight for a while. I remember when it came before the public for a citywide vote some twenty years ago. There were public forums to discuss it. I was a strong proponent because I thought it was just common sense that we should have some regulation as to what kind of buildings should be built in different areas of the city. Most cities the size of Rosenberg have this.

KALKOMEY: In its place, City Council and planning Commission adopted some regulations that effectively do some things that zoning would do, but it's not near as effective.

BAUMGARTNER: How long do people stay on the planning Commission?

KALKOMEY: The appointments are made every couple of years by City Council, but you've got some people that have been there for a number of years. Pete Pavlovsky has been there for a long time.

BAUMGARTNER: There was an obituary in the Fort Bend Herald recently involving a member of Pete's family stating that Pete, who had I think seven siblings, was the last surviving child. It was a sad note but I was glad to see that it served to indicate how long he had been involved and contributing to the city in various capacities. I remember him serving as Fire Marshall for decades, at least thirty years.

Another respected volunteer has been James Urbish, a member of a long-time Rosenberg family business. He has been serving on the Planning Commission off and on for years and other city activities, and should receive more recognition for the time and leadership he has provided in showing up at City Council meetings and helping manage the city.

KALKOMEY: They would appreciate it.

BAUMGARTNER: What's a good background or a good perspective or a good attitude for somebody to serve on the planning Commission?

KALKOMEY: I think you first have to have an open mind and be able to listen to the discussions and make a decision. There are people who run for political offices and have a specific agenda. If your specific agenda were to say, all lots must be 100 foot wide, and that's your mindset, you probably wouldn't be a very good Planning Commission member. I think if you've got some experience with real estate or the development of property, that could help.

It is good to have someone who has an overall vision for the community. But the vision has to be something that you can modify and adjust as time goes by and markets change. And you have got to be flexible enough to be open and listening and then make your decision based on the facts.

BAUMGARTNER: Now, when someone comes with a real estate project, does the planning Commission have to approve all of it in its entirety?

KALKOMEY: They have to approve the platting. They make a recommendation to City Council. City Council is the one that makes the final decision.

BAUMGARTNER: City Council could overrule planning commission.

KALKOMEY: Yes, but rarely does.

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

BAUMGARTNER: Has Seabourne Creek Nature Park had a positive impact on the city of Rosenberg?

Editor's Note: [Click this link for more on Seabourne Creek Nature Park.](#)

KALKOMEY: I think so. It's a draw for some events, serves certain segments of the population, and it's certainly a big drainage help.

BAUMGARTNER: I mean, to me, it's just neat for a city that relatively speaking is as small as Rosenberg is and has created a 164-acre outdoor park like this. I'd like to make some comments about Seabourne Creek Nature Park as a good illustration of the impact

volunteers can make on a community.

Seabourne used to be a well-kept secret with limited attractions. Over the past ten years it has been built up by Texas Master Naturalist volunteers and now is used by a sizeable cross section of the local population. A lake, lots of shade trees, lots of walking paths. Kids love it, there's no place to go outdoors for most of them today. Families with small children love it. Seniors like taking advantage of it and being outside. Naturalists especially like it, there's a 20-acre native prairie project, butterfly gardens, excellent birdwatching. You can walk around the lake or through the woods and look at flowers. You can fish or ride a bicycle or sit on a bench outdoors. It is free and safe and conveniently located in the city limits.

KALKOMEY: I have seen some of the drawings and the sketches for the Nature Center.

BAUMGARTNER: Yeah, I've worked to develop the proposed Nature Center project since 2011. I went to City Manager Jack Hamlett then and he got it approved for inclusion in a 2013 bond offering. But the offering fell apart under new Mayor Cynthia McConathy when the offering was canceled, and subsequent administrations failed to arrange financing for construction. Projected cost estimate was doubled when one administration alleged that \$1,500,000 was needed for landscaping, effectively killing the project, when in fact only a nominal amount was needed for landscaping. Finally, under a city referendum in 2019, Rosenberg citizens voted by a healthy margin to authorize the city to arrange financing and build a nature center at Seabourne Creek Nature Park.

The Park is a great illustration of how much difference local volunteers can make to a city. The improvements and the maintenance and the planning performed by the Master Naturalists have transformed the property; from a barren field it has become a beautiful natural outdoor park heavily used by residents. Annually the chapter submits to the Rosenberg Development Corp a grant request with a schedule of proposed annual improvements for the park accompanied by estimated costs. All volunteer labor and administrative costs are at no charge and at the end of the year the Master Naturalist chapter submits an itemized check register for every penny of Grant funds spent during the course of the year. When the first grant was approved in 2009, the Chapter was told that it wouldn't be necessary to include a check register. The Chapter advised the RDC that this was the Chapter's preference, in order to make the grant expenditures 100% transparent.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

Charles, looking back on your career, was it possible to imagine back in the 1990's what

would be going on today or where Rosenberg was headed? Could you see it coming?

KALKOMEY: I guess I always knew there would be some growth, but we didn't think it would be this exponential. It was the same growth going on between Katy and Brookshire on 1-10. And now we are doing 7500 homes on the north side of Katy. It's just unbelievable.

BAUMGARTNER: "Coming from California". I read again today that the biggest source of new people in Texas is from California.

KALKOMEY: Nothing worked over there in California, so let's hope they don't come over here and ruin it for us. I recently saw a presentation that said if we didn't plan for water in Texas by the year 2070, it would mean 1.4 million fewer people in Texas. Part of me says that's fine.

BAUMGARTNER: The population would be reduced?

KALKOMEY: The population would be less by 1.4 million because there would not be enough water to support them. So, let's leave all those California people over there.

BAUMGARTNER: Of course, you're being facetious, but the thought has some merit. We don't have to fall for the "build it and they will come" philosophy.

Do you think of anything today that the county should be anticipating or where the city could do a little better job of planning now or needs to keep its eyes on?

KALKOMEY: Well, the thing is just to be in the "planning for growth" mode. Being able to fund road extensions and utility extensions and have adequate police force and fire Department personnel and equipment to accommodate all this growth.

To me, it all sort of started when Mr. Gurecky and Mr. Hopkins and city leaders built Reading Road through that cotton field to nowhere and the vision they had as to what that might bring and do.

And we've got to continue to have that same vision and anticipate what might be needed in the future and be willing to spend the money to do it.

We've cut taxes and the sales taxes have replaced that. So, we're in good shape. But if we get to the point where we have a big project and we need to sell bonds or obtain funding to make it happen, I hope that the leadership is still willing to consider the necessity of taking

on some debt for the benefits that it brings. You can look at what the county has been doing with their mobility bonds every several years and what they're doing with the roads.

BAUMGARTNER: For example?

KALKOMEY: Just the building of the new Bryan Road with those mobility funds. Koeblen Road is planned to be built all the way from FM2977 across FM2218 all the way to Highway 36. That'll be mobility funds. The county is funding part of it but the city is a beneficiary and we have to participate and fund a portion of it. There will be mobility bond issues.

BAUMGARTNER: Okay. Now how would you characterize the job that Rosenberg has done for the last 20 years or so?

KALKOMEY: I would have to say it's good. Except for that period of time which we have emerged from, when not much on the surface seemed to be done due to friction at city hall.

BAUMGARTNER: Several years with too much dissension. Actually, the City Council and office of City Manager John Maresh seem to be in good shape right now. City officials I deal with like Joyce Vasut, Travis Tanner do a good job with the public and most everybody seem to be on the same page.

KALKOMEY: Council meetings are very productive.

BAUMGARTNER: How's new mayor Kevin Raines doing?

KALKOMEY: I think he's doing a good job in keeping that attitude going. And by the way, thank you for taking this on and trying to do something to preserve some history.

BAUMGARTNER: It's pretty interesting actually. And if it's not set aside in writing, it can go by the wayside.

KALKOMEY: I think city management has done a good job of planning for the future and making the city as financially secure as they could. They cut a lot of debt. They retired some bonds. You will never get rid of the debt totally. It just exists because of its function; you are going to have some debt. They're whittling away at it, trying to get it down lower.

But they have spent a lot of money in the last few years on aging infrastructure. Not only roads but some water and sanitary sewer lines they have replaced.

BAUMGARTNER: Which was a necessity, right?

KALKOMEY: Yeah. And got overlooked for so many years. They're firmly behind that in addressing those infrastructure needs, and you have to take one bite at a time. And that's what they've been doing every year. They'll spend money to take a section of town and upgrade or replace the infrastructure.

BAUMGARTNER: Any other comments or thoughts? Would you do it all again?

KALKOMEY: Oh yes, I would and I'll continue to do it for a while yet. I think whether it's a City manager or public works person or a Council person or the engineer, you have to have a passion to improve the area and want to help the public. As long as that attitude still burns the city will do well. And I think that passion exists at the staff level as well as with our elected officials.

BAUMGARTNER: It's been a pleasure talking to you.

KALKOMEY: Yes, thank you.



The Kalkomeys

End of interview