

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Earnest Taylor**

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Transcript

GOODSILL: I was hoping we could start with a little family background. How did your people get to Fort Bend County?

TAYLOR: Well, actually, I'm the only one that made it to Fort Bend County. My parents and I lived in Hope, Arkansas, where I was born and raised. They remained there after I went to school and went to the service. After the service I got a job in Texas City.

GOODSILL: What was your job when you were in the service?

TAYLOR: I was in the Armored Division. Tanks, if you will. And I'm 6'8" tall and they stuck me in a tank! You'd think I'd have been a lineman someplace, working on high lines. (chuckles) I could stand flat-footed and look out the turret of the tank.

GOODSILL: Where were you stationed?

TAYLOR: I was in Fort Hood and Fort Knox, Kentucky. I went into the service in 1959 and went to those two stations. I was a volunteer draft for two years.

GOODSILL: So you didn't particularly learn a skill? Except for driving a tank.

TAYLOR: That might have been good for dozer work, if you wanted to operate bulldozer. It was an eye opener. In my school years I was tall and played basketball. Anther guy and I were pretty good at our old country school. We got out and went into the service and dealt with guys from all over the country and found out there were a LOT of people that were good at basketball. And we were NOT on the top! (laughs)

When I got out of the service I went back to Hope and worked at the Hope Auto Company for a while, in the parts department. I probably worked there a year or so. Finally I left and come to Texas. I had some folks--aunts and uncles--who lived in Texas City and I had an opportunity to get a job. So I came to Texas.

GOODSILL: Did you have brothers and sisters?

TAYLOR: Did not. I'm an only child.

GOODSILL: Tell me your parents' names.

TAYLOR: My dad's name is Oba Lawrence Taylor. My mother's name is Trudy Elizabeth Barham Taylor

GOODSILL: So you got to Texas City. And then what did you do?

TAYLOR: Well, I worked for a construction company. We did roofing work and I worked framing too. It was an interesting time. For a young man, I made pretty good money doing that. But after a while I decided I really needed to find a good job and I applied for a job in Houston. The advertisement was for an assistant manager for Jubilee City, out on the Eastex Freeway. I went to work out there as a trainee. I was in the Housewares Department. I worked there for a long time. It was brand new, and we helped stock the store and get it all together. But when the store opened, somebody ELSE got the assistant manager job, probably rightfully so, but it made me mad and I left. I just quit! "If I can't be president of the company or assistant manager, I'm just not going to work here!"

So I quit. I went to the employment agency and I told them I wanted a career job, something with a future. It wasn't too long before they called me and they had an opening at Johnston Schlumberger in Sugar Land. They were looking for somebody to work in the Shipping and Receiving Department. I went out and interviewed and after I talked to the man in shipping and receiving, he called the manager of the instrument shop. And he came over and talked to me a little bit and I eventually went to work for Johnston Schlumberger as an instrument technician. We built and repaired all types of clocks used in downhole pressure measuring for oil wells. I did that for eight years. My family was all back from Cale, Arkansas. They farmed and hauled logs during that time.

GOODSILL: So you were an instrument technician and you ended up being the chief of police in Sugar Land! How did that happen? (both laugh)

TAYLOR: Well, I had a GOOD job with Johnston Schlumberger, a really good job. When I left Jubilee City in Houston, I was very much on my own and without a whole lot of resources. In fact, I had just blown the engine in my car and I was just about eating and sleeping out of my car. It wasn't a pretty picture. When I worked at Jubilee City I had an apartment with a friend in Houston. I had to leave because when I quit that job, I didn't have any money. And it wasn't LONG before I went to work for Johnston, but it was long enough! When you don't have a lot to start with, you run out pretty fast.

When I came to Sugar Land and went to work for Johnston, I had absolutely NUTHIN'! Didn't have a car. Mrs. Vlasta Stavinoha, run the Stavinoha Hotel in Sugar Land--it's long gone now. [It was originally called the Attwood Hotel then the Stavinoha Hotel then the Prikryl Hotel.]

She was a sweet lady and she let me live in the Stavinoha Hotel for a month until I got paid. The monthly rent then was \$28.00. She let me stay there for the first month. Mr. Herbert Haas ran the restaurant right across 90, across the tracks where Logene Foster's office is today. I went over and talked to him and Herbert Haas let me eat at the restaurant for two weeks until I got paid. He told me I could eat anything I wanted, three meals a day. So I would go over in the morning and eat some breakfast and then he would fix me a sandwich to go and I'd carry it for my lunch. And then I'd come back in the evening and have dinner at the restaurant.



Stavinoha Hotel

GOODSILL: So far you are LIKING this town!

TAYLOR: Oh, yeah! (laughs) I managed to stay in a hotel and I ate at Haas's Restaurant. When I got paid, well of course I went to pay my rent and to pay Haas. I'll never forget what Herbert Haas told me when I came to pay my bill. He said, 'What are you talking about?' And I said, 'Well, I owe you for two weeks of meals.' He said, 'You're going to pay?' And I said, 'Yeah'. He said, 'Do you know that I never, ever expected to get this money? I figured I was just donating it and that you'd never pay it.' I said, 'Well, I'm sorry you felt that way, but I AM going to pay it. I want to pay it.' So I did. And I can tell you that from that day on, if I asked for the moon, Herbert Haas would give it to me. And Mrs. Stavinoha was good to me too.

GOODSILL: Her hotel - is it where Nalco is now?

TAYLOR: It was across the street. It was between where the Farmer's Market is today and Ulrich Street. It was two-story and long with a porch on the outside. I lived on the second floor. Now this was a unique place because you didn't have restrooms in the rooms. The restrooms were at the end of the porch. You had to go out on the porch and walk down the porch to go to the restroom or for your shower.

There were four of us that lived on the second floor, three ladies and myself. Their names were May Nichols, Annie Blinka and Ms. Howard. The ladies were older than I was, probably middle-aged. They'd be back and forth to the restroom and I had to pick my time in between. It worked out fine.

My mother and daddy did a lot for me. They didn't have anything but they gave me a lot of love and direction on being polite and respecting your elders. So when I lived at the hotel, I'd help the ladies. If they went and got groceries I'd carry their groceries up for them. I was nice to them and polite and would visit with them a little bit. MY WORD - I got cookies, they just kept me in everything.

GOODSILL: You're REALLY liking this town, now!

TAYLOR: Oh, yeah - I'm really doing good! The hotel was right behind the clinic, Dr. Slaughter and Dr. Kuykendahl's clinic there. Ulrich Street runs like this and that old hotel kind of set at an angle. There were four rooms upstairs and I think there were two downstairs. Mrs. Stavinoha lived downstairs.

I think the ladies had a little stove or hot plates or something because they always were giving me cookies and stuff. Mrs. Stavinoha was good to me, she felt sorry for me and she gave me an icebox up there and then she put a window fan in for me. She was really nice to me.

GOODSILL: How long did you live there?

TAYLOR: I went there in late 1960 and I lived there until I got married in 1963.

GOODSILL: Why don't you describe to me what the clinic was like?

TAYLOR: It was a white stucco building. Dr. Slaughter's office was right in front facing Kempner Street, where the Farmer's Market is today. And Dr. Wheeler's [dentist] office was in there as well. And Dr. Kuykendahl's office. It was a nice building.



GOODSILL: I have a picture of the clinic, too. It had palm trees in the waiting room.

TAYLOR: Anyway, I lived in the Stavinoha Hotel. Got up in the morning, go over to the Haas Café and have breakfast. The first four days I walked or rode a bus--there was a bus stop there--and I could get that bus and ride out to Johnston.

GOODSILL: Was Johnston where Schlumberger is now?

TAYLOR: Yes. At the far end of it though. It was on Industrial Boulevard. A Greyhound bus come through town and stopped at Haas's Café. I asked the driver one morning, 'Can I ride about three miles out here? What would you charge me?' He said don't worry about it.

GOODSILL: You just made friends everywhere, didn't you?

TAYLOR: You know, it paid to be polite and courteous, and not to take things for granted. I'd get on there and it was perfect for about three or four days. Then I met somebody at work that I got to be friends with and they would come by in the morning, stop and pick me up and we'd go on to work. And I worked out there from '60-'61 to 1968. During that period of time I was bettering my financial situation. I finally wound up with a car and I decided instead of having a car like I used to have - a power packed 1957 Chevrolet - I thought I don't need that anymore because that's just going to get me in trouble. I'm going to wind up doing what I did before, racing or something and blow the engine on it. So I got me a Ford Falcon. I got back and forth to work, no problem. I made those clocks, we ground and cut gears with little jeweler's lathes and grinders and stuff. I learned a LOT working at Johnston. It was VERY informative. A LIFE experience because you learn how things are made and how different machinery works.

In 1963 or around that time, I met my wife-to-be. Her name is Margie Pearl Hertel. Her family came to Sugar Land from the Schulenburg area in the 1940s. They've lived here a LONG time. Margie had finished high school and was going to Wharton County Junior College, she had to be bused back and forth to Wharton. Interesting thing about that - B. J. Thomas drove the bus part of the time! He and his band were originally from here. [The East Bernard, Beasley, Rosenberg area] Lot of folks around here played in the band. One of the guys that worked at Johnston Testers, Teddy Mensik, played the drums.

GOODSILL: So they had REAL jobs until they made it big.

TAYLOR: Oh that's right, or BJ made it big. Anyway Margie rode back and forth to Wharton on the bus and I can't remember where I saw her the first time, but I was attracted her. She was a very pretty girl. The Lion's Club used to have Carnivals in the shopping center parking lot. They had all kinds of things out there but one the things they had was a cake walk. I was at that carnival one time and Margie and a couple of her friends were at the cakewalk. She was scrambling around trying to find another dime to walk on the cakewalk. Of course that was my opportunity to give her a dime. She went on that cakewalk and I visited with her and talked to her. Of course the rest is history! I asked her for a date and we went out. I think I met her in late '62 and we were married in June 1963. We just celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary this year.

GOODSILL: Congratulations!

TAYLOR: Our kids done us so proud. They just really did a good job for us. Enjoyed it. But anyway, if you want to go somewhere else with this, if I'm jumping over some stuff--

GOODSILL: You're not. But I can't figure out how you got into law enforcement. I'm waiting!

TAYLOR: (laughing) I almost hesitate to tell you, because it doesn't speak well of my mentality. It really doesn't. Margie and I both worked. We lived in a little duplex for about six months or so, on Venice. Right there in Sugar Land. It belonged to Mr. Tommy Greenwald. We lived in that duplex but we wanted to build us a house, so we bought a lot in the then brand-new Brookside Subdivision. We paid \$3,000 for that lot and that was a lot of money back then. I had the lot and a man that worked for Sugarland Industries, John Dullahan, he was their real estate person.

GOODSILL: How do you spell that?

TAYLOR: I have no clue. That's my other very, very big weakness, is spelling. When I was going to school, teachers were trying to tell us to diagram the sentences and learn to spell, learn to do this and that. But I KNEW that wasn't the important thing in life.

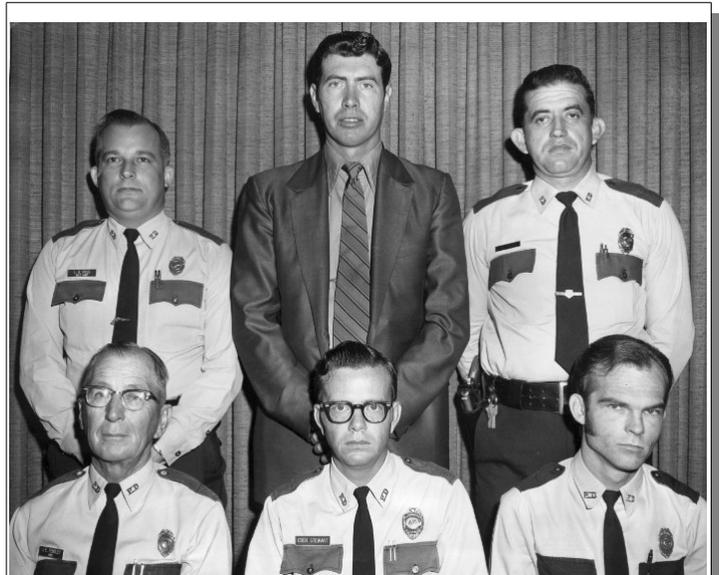
GOODSILL: But interestingly enough, you could make highly technical clocks for downhole measurements. So, there you go! (both laugh)

TAYLOR: I knew the most important thing in life was football, baseball, and basketball.

GOODSILL: OH, you KNEW that!

TAYLOR: Yeah, I knew that. All this diagramming sentences and spelling--who would ever need that?! Anyway, Dullahan asked me, 'When are you going to build a house?' 'I don't know'. I was very proud. I said, 'We own the lot and we've paid for it. I'm not worried about it. I'll build one day.' Dullahan told me, 'Every day that goes by that you own that lot, and you're not living on it or doing something with it, you're losing money.' I said, 'What do you mean, losing money?' He said, 'You're losing money. You're paying taxes and the \$3,000 you COULD have invested someplace, making you money, that you are not making money on it. So you're losing money every day.' So Margie and I got busy and drew up some plans and we built the house. Moved in the house in 1965. From the time I went to work for Johnston and married Margie, we saved our money and saved our money, and we were NEVER rich but we were comfortable. Our first child, Robin Lynn, come along in '65, our oldest daughter. And then our middle daughter, Kelly Jean, came along in '67. So now I have a wife, two children and we had two new cars and a brand new house.

I wanted to be a Sheriff Reserve. I always wanted to be in law enforcement. Always had that in the back of my mind. Never planned to really DO it, but I just wanted to do it. So I went down and talked to the Sheriff and the people in the Sheriff's Reserve. They said sure, here's an application. Fill it out, get some references and come on over and we'll put you into the Sheriff's Reserve. I took the application, filled it out and went down to then Chief of Police J. E. Fendley and asked him if he would be



Back: Asst Chief Larry Ross, Taylor, patrolman Bob Tollett, Front: Chief J.E. Fendley, Patrolman Eber Stewart, Patrolman Kenneth Czarnecki

a reference for me. Over those years, when Margie and I were married, we belonged to the Jaycees and I was in some Jaycee projects, and beginning to get involved in some of the civic stuff in Sugar Land. So Chief Fendley knew me. So he told me, 'Why do you want to do that? Just go to work for me.' I said, 'Go to work for you?' 'Yes, I'm looking for somebody to work at the Police Department full-time.' And I said, 'Oh, I couldn't DO that.' He said, 'Think about it. You don't have to be Sheriff Reserve. Just come over here and work for me full-time at the Police Department.'

I asked him how much it paid and asked some questions about it. Went home and talked to Margie. I had my own office out there at Johnston and was doing instruments, but it was the same old thing all the time. It was GOOD - it paid good. We talked about it, thought about it, and Margie said, 'If that's what you want to do, let's do it.' So I wound up taking a job at the Sugar Land Police Department. I was asking him for a reference to go to work as a Reserve Deputy, and he invited me to go to work for Sugar Land Police Department. At the time, at Johnston, I was making \$950 a month or something to that effect, with overtime. We worked quite a bit of overtime, but I was averaging about \$950 a month. I went to work for Sugar Land Police Department at \$550 a month. That's the reason I say it kind of reflects poorly on my mentality.

GOODSILL: (laughing) Being a public servant isn't lucrative!

TAYLOR: But that was just what I wanted to do. And I thought I'd be good at it. And of course, at the time I was tired of going in every day and doing the same thing. That wasn't REALLY what I liked. I did it because it was a good income and they were good to me out there. Johnston was very good to me. I just wanted to do something on my own.

GOODSILL: So what were some of your first responsibilities when you went into police work?

TAYLOR: First was patrol. Sugar Land had about 2,900, close to 3,000 population. The police department was four people

GOODSILL: Can you give me a boundary for how far your patrol was?

TAYLOR: We did not have, at that time, any of the Greenbriar and all that out there on Eldridge Road. Sugar Mill was not there. It was from St. Theresa's Catholic Church on 7th Street up to Highway 6, which was a two-lane highway. It was a little thing. It was probably from that drainage ditch back the other way and then went out to just past Nalco. It was very small.

GOODSILL: No New Territory, no First Colony.

TAYLOR: Old Sugar Land. That's it. The Hill. Venetian Estates was new. Brookside area, Oyster Creek Drive.

GOODSILL: Was Schlumberger part of Sugar Land?

TAYLOR: That was in Sugar Land. It went down 90 probably to where the 59 overpass is

now. It was March of 1969 when I went to work for the police department. Chief Fendley carried me out to City Hall. The City Secretary, at a council meeting, raised her right hand and I raised my hand, and 'do you swear to do this, that and whatever the oath' and I said, 'I do.' And Chief Fendley said, 'Well, you're going to have to buy your own pistol and your own leathers'. And I did that. In fact I probably done that before I was sworn in. He said, 'Now, what I'm going to do, is I'm going to put you with old Dan Colvin and old Dan will teach you the ropes.' Old Dan Colvin's been around for a while. So I rode with him for two weeks and they cut me loose. Gave me a Texas penal code, code of criminal procedure book -- we had to SHARE that book! We left that in the car. It wasn't MINE. So I was enforcing the law with that experience. Two weeks experience.

GOODSILL: What kind of crime or police activity did you need to do?

TAYLOR: Burglary and petty theft was the majority of what we had back in the early days. Stolen bicycles. During those days and all through my career, we were never really a HIGH traffic police department. We didn't set up and write tickets. And I can truthfully say that all those years, I was NEVER encouraged to write citations. People think sometimes that cities encourage their police department to write citations for the revenue. And I can truthfully say, in thirty-four years, NO ONE has ever encouraged me to write citations. If they had a problem with traffic, they encouraged you to get out there and stop that problem. If it meant writing tickets, that's fine. But it did not HAVE to be that. I could stop people, warn them, I could do a lot of things. Just sitting out there. But we were never really focused for the income for the city.

Bicycle thefts, burglaries, coin-operated machines used to sit outside sometimes would be broken into. Back over in Mayfield Park they'd break into that beer joint, get his money or valuables out of there. And there were residential burglaries. That was the big majority of it. We rode around and just patrolled the area. As a patrol officer, that's what we were doing.

GOODSILL: Just have a physical presence. You enjoyed it?

TAYLOR: I did! I loved it. I loved law enforcement from the time I went to work for the force to the time I left.

GOODSILL: You probably had a lot more interaction with people than you did being a technician.

TAYLOR: I DID! And I liked that. I like people, I like visiting with people and talking to

them. And it felt good when you were able to help someone. It felt good when you were able to arrest someone who's hurting other folks.

GOODSILL: Where was the police station located?

TAYLOR: When I went to work for them, the police station was-- remember when we were talking about the clinic? Right next door to the clinic was Roy Cordes' Cleaners. That was the Police Department, it was the City Hall, it was Water Quality, it was everything!

Municipal Court. The whole shootin' match - that's what it was. And it was unique! We'd go to City Council meeting there and then that night, after we'd call it good, the judge would come down to warn

somebody for some violation. That little old building there was pretty active. It was used day AND night.

GOODSILL: Was there a jail in it?

TAYLOR: No. There was no jail. There was a jail in Sugar Land. I don't know who made that jail.



SL City Council Mayor Ted Harmon, Councilman Melvin Pomikai, City Secretary Hazel McJunkin, City Atty Charles Sloan, partial Councilman Bill Little, Councilwoman Minnie Ulrich, EA Hayes, Councilman C.E. McFadden

GOODSILL: Where was it?

TAYLOR: Right behind Cordes Cleaners. There was an old tin shack that had bars in the windows and dirt floors. And if people had to be held, they went in there. When I went to work in law enforcement that was not the procedure we used. That was used back when it was a company town and they had the City Marshall. If City Marshall and their security wanted to hold somebody, they'd put them in there. Deputy Sheriffs would come get them and take them to the jail. I guess you could refer to that as kind of a hold-over type thing. It wasn't where you served a sentence or were held for any length of time.

GOODSILL: Tell us something about Roy Cordes.

TAYLOR: Senior or Junior?

GOODSILL: Senior!

TAYLOR: When I lived in the hotel, during that time I didn't have a car I'd come home from work at Johnson every day, I go up to my room and change and it was almost a DAILY routine that I would come down from my room and walk right



over there to Cordes Cleaners and crawl up on that front counter. And lean back against that wall and get me a bottle of Coke, and he'd tell me all kinds of stories about flying. OH, he'd tell me stories. I was, like, 'You're kidding! You did?! Huh?!' I had always wanted to fly. As a kid I was just eat up with it. I loved it. I went there every day for a LONG time. Eventually Roy became Mayor and I went to work for the police department. He came on to City Council and then Mayor. Roy was good to me. They were my family.

I don't want to go back too much, but my mother and daddy didn't have a lot of worldly wealth. My dad was blind, had polio when he was two years old. And my mother didn't work. She took care of Dad. So I came up through school and they took care of me. I always had nice clothes -- not rich-y clothes but I had nice clothes, clean. They give me the spiritual education that I needed. I always accepted it, but didn't always follow it like I should have. But they gave me a foundation to grow on and a lot of love. When I come out of the service I wound up coming to Texas and getting away from that poor environment. I didn't want to leave them out because they were VERY much a foundation for me to grow on. I've wished a lot of times that I could have brought them down. I was going to bring them down but my dad passed away before I could get him down here. I brought my mother down, though. She lived here for a long time.

GOODSILL: She must have liked Sugar Land.

TAYLOR: Oh, she LOVED Sugar Land. She really did. She's a unique lady. Very much a Christian lady. I was forty-two years old and I hid beer in my own house when she'd come there. When she'd come to visit, I didn't want to listen to the sermons, you know! Well, my dad was sick and passed away in 1973. Before he passed away, Margie and I bought a house on Brooks Street for Mom and Dad. Because I knew that one day I was going to wind up having to bring Mother and Daddy down from Arkansas, I'd be taking care of one or the other of them. So we bought a home on Brooks Street, one of those little brick homes, the next to the last one, on the right, going toward Highway 6. The people that lived there robbed us when they sold it to us. We paid \$9,500 for that house. That was terrible. Can you imagine, \$9,500.

GOODSILL: That was so expensive.

TAYLOR: WHEW! Well, it was then. But think about it now? Oh my word! But we bought the house and we rented it for a while. Mother and Dad didn't want to come down. They wanted to stay where they were. So we rented the house until such time that we could convince them to pick up and move. They had all their friends there; they went to church there. So we wound up with that house for a while and then finally my dad got sick, and I went back up and visited with him several times. I told him that when you get well and get out of the hospital, I want y'all to come to Texas. We've got the house and everything's there and you'll love it. And that was the plan. But he never got well. He wound up passing away.

But when he passed away, I loaded Mama up and brought her down. She stayed with us for a while and we left the house rented, and then finally moved her over to that house. She lived there for a long time. Everybody loved her. My goodness alive, when she passed away, everybody in the post office signed a card. The postal people would come by and she would give them cookies and they'd take cookies back up to the post office. She had them all wrapped around her fingers.

GOODSILL: You started with the police department in 1969 and when did you retire?

TAYLOR: 2003.

GOODSILL: So, when you started, the population was around 3,000. When you retired in 2003, what do you think the population was?

TAYLOR: Around 68,000.

GOODSILL: (laughing) Do you want to tell us something about the growth and the changes in the job?

TAYLOR: The first area that came into the city was Covington Woods, off Eldridge Road. That increased the population considerably. Not long after that we got Sugar Creek. That changed things considerably because the demographics and expectations shifted. The older people in Sugar Land--we knew their wives, their families, their kids and everything else. Covington Woods came in and that changed. But when Sugar Creek came the people were, for the most part, from outside of Sugar Land; doctors, lawyers, executives and like that. At that time they paid a whole lot more taxes.

GOODSILL: Paying higher taxes, owning high-priced property and lots so they had expectations of their police force?

TAYLOR: That's right. So the police department grew and the City kept up with the population growth, with the growth of the police department. We didn't have everything we wanted. I don't think anybody ever does. But I think we had everything we needed and I think ALL the city councilmen and mayors did their very best to be forward thinking. They had a vision and they kept up with it. It makes me very proud today to be able to say that I retired from the Sugar Land Police Department. It is very well respected, statewide. It really is. A lot of people don't know that, but WELL-respected.

I remember, for a long time, as Assistant Chief and Chief, I belonged to the Texas Police Chief's Association. And when I retired, I was vice-president. But for years, I'd go to schools and I recall going to a school years and years ago and it was a computer school. And they were talking about how you could enter this data and you could do this and do that. I asked the question, 'Does that work with this other software?' He said, 'What software?' And I told him and he said, 'Earnest, get out of here. Go to the BIG city class.' They had the classes divided up in large cities, medium-sized cities and small cities. And I was still going to the small cities. He told me, 'Get out of here. You don't even belong in this one. That software y'all have is so far ahead of this, you don't even belong here. Go to the other class. And don't stop at the middle sized cities, go to the large cities. That's what you are now, in case you don't know it.'

And every time I went somewhere to an association or classes, when a question came up, they'd always say, 'Well, what does Woodville, Colorado, do?' They were the cutting edge. Everybody wanted to keep up with them. They'd say, 'Well they do it this way. That's the way we want to do it.' But let me tell you, before I retired, when something came up in the Texas Police Chief's Association, they'd say, 'Well, this is a different deal here. Ernie, how do y'all do it, in Sugar Land?' And I would tell them. Sugar Land took that place, and I was SO proud of that.

GOODSILL: What year did you become chief?

TAYLOR: 1992. When I talked to the chief about going to work for the police department, I always wanted to be a detective. And I told him that I'd go to work for him if he'd let me go to school and learn and one day be a detective. And he said he'd do it. He did everything he said he'd do. Every time I asked to go to a school, I was able to go. The first one, which probably carried me furthest down the road, was Institute of Applied Science. That was in Chicago and it was a correspondence thing. That went into fingerprints, photography, handwriting, and typewriter identification for forensic law enforcement. I graduated from that and it wasn't long afterward that Fort Bend County (Richmond, Rosenberg, Missouri City) got a federal grant for a Fort Bend County Major Crimes Task Force. And that task force was made up of members from Rosenberg, Richmond, Sheriff's Department, Sugar Land and Missouri City. Stafford was not a part of that. I got assigned to that task force. And that was in 1971. So I went from '69, '70 and '71 as a patrol officer and then went over to work in that Major Crimes Task Force.

That was a well funded, through LEAA (Law Enforcement Assistance Administration). We were federally funded, had all kinds of James Bond stuff and it was really well equipped. We assisted with investigations. We didn't investigate - I was always careful about that because if you said WE investigated it, then you're leaving out the agency. Like we helped with a crime in Rosenberg. We didn't do it - they did it, and we just helped them. But we assisted with all the major criminal investigations throughout the county. That was a GREAT thing. It was a good career opportunity. We investigated a LOT of major crimes, serious stuff, with a lot of media attention.

I'll tell you some stories about that. I was in that task force from 1972 to 1982 - ten years. And in that time I went to captain, and was director of that unit. The guy that started out as director of the task force said that was just too much. 'I'm not prepared to put that much time and effort into it, and my family won't allow that' and so he left. And then I was appointed as Director. Good and bad, because as I look back now, I wish I'd spent more time at home sometimes with my kids. But I LOVED what I did. I'd get up in the morning thinking about task force and go bed at night thinking about task force. We investigated a lot of major crimes. In 1982, Chief Fendley retired and they appointed Assistant Chief Larry Ross, as Chief. And they brought me back from the task force as Assistant Chief. So in 1982 I left the task force and came back into the rank and file of the City. I was Assistant Chief from 1982 to 1988 and then Larry Ross retired and they brought a guy in by the name of John Looper from Irving Police Department. I was a commander, and all they did was change the title, until 1992. In 1992, Looper left and I was appointed Chief. And I was Chief from '92 until 2003.

GOODSILL: Tell us about some of the major crimes.

TAYLOR: One of the major crimes was a murder case in Sugar Land. In 1978, there was a double murder in Sugar Land. The Anderson murder. Mary Lou Anderson's family lived in Fort Bend County. She and a guy came over from Louisiana and murdered her father and her stepmother and went back to Louisiana. That was for insurance purposes. She came over here with a guy by the name of Feryl Granger. He never did do any time over it but he was certainly arrested and went through the process. We suspected whom it was pretty much from the very beginning and we were in Louisiana for a LONG time that year, working with the Louisiana State Police and trying to narrow that down. We wound up bringing Mary Lou back. She went to trial on that case and she got the death sentence.

I've got newspaper clippings from the Vatican putting Texas down for putting a woman on death row. Well, we thought, that's not a good thing to have the Pope against you! He made some pretty bad comments. We got newspaper clippings from Hamburg, Germany and it was all over, because it was the first woman in I forgot how many years that had been convicted and sentenced to death, anywhere!

(http://www.leagle.com/decision/19831521653SW2d868_11400.xml/GRANGER%20v.%20STATE)

GOODSILL: Did she GET put to death?

TAYLOR: No. She wound up appealing. She came back and they retried her and the second time they tried her, they cut a deal with her and she got fifty years in the penitentiary and that's all.

GOODSILL: Was the trial in this courthouse? (Old Richmond Courthouse)

TAYLOR: It wasn't tried in this courthouse. The first time she was tried in Wharton. The second time she was tried was in Bay City.

GOODSILL: They had to change the venue because Sugar Land was too opinionated?

TAYLOR: That's right. She wound up the second time getting fifty years. She did thirty-something years and was paroled and is now out somewhere.

GOODSILL: Did you have to use a lot of James Bond techniques in order to solve the case?



TAYLOR: It's really interesting how we did it. I'm really interested in that kind of thing. That's what I think makes good investigators. I had a LOT of GOOD people that worked for me. They made me look good but we wound up working with some of the forensics. When they called me and told me that they had a double murder in Sugar Land, I was flying to Salt Lake City, Utah, with one of my task force people, to pick up a prisoner out there for another case. Because of the weather and because it was night, the plane was not equipped with oxygen so I couldn't fly OVER the Rockies, we landed in Tucumcari, New Mexico. We got out of the airplane, got the airplane tied down and squared away and went to the hotel. [By this time Taylor was a pilot.] I was checking in to the hotel when they called the hotel and wanted to talk to me. They said to return immediately. 'We have a double murder in Sugar Land.' I said, 'You've got to be kidding me! I'm in Tucumcari, New Mexico and it's seven or eight o'clock at night. I'm going to turn around and fly all the way back to Sugar Land?' They said, 'You need to return immediately.' And I said, 'Are you SURE?' And they said, 'Chief Fendley is standing right here and he said GET HOME NOW!' And I said, 'I'm on my way.' I knew how to stay employed! (laughing) So we loaded into the airplane and took off. We landed over here about one or two o'clock. Went over the case and the bottom line was that the initial investigation of that double murder was SO skimpy. I don't think there were but about five or six photographs. Fingerprints were not gathered. Evidence wasn't gathered. I could have cried. We started there.

GOODSILL: Had it been Sugar Land detectives?

TAYLOR: No, it wasn't Sugar Land. I'm sure Sugar Land helped but the ones that were responsible for it wasn't Sugar Land. It just wasn't a good job. The only thing that was left at the scene that WE wound up with, the only real solid evidence was the shell casings. There were shell casings left at the scene. So we gathered the shell casings. I told one of the guys from Houston Firearms, 'I'm going to take these casings and I'm going to go to Remington Peters.' (The manufacturer of them.) They were .25-caliber Remington Peters and I found out that those shells were manufactured in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. I told Ed Martinez, with Houston Firearms, 'I'm going to take these to the manufacturer and I'm going to find out when they were made, what lots they went in to, where that lot were shipped to and when I find that out, I'm going to find out every store in that area that sells Remington Peters ammunition. And then I'm going to every store and go back through their books and see when somebody bought these shells. If Remington can tell me when they're bought, then I'll go back to whatever that is and thumb through and see all the people that bought these shells!'

And Ed says, 'It ain't going to work. They can't DO that. Do you realize how many .25-caliber shells Remington Peters makes?' And I said, 'Well, I KNOW it, but that's all we got. I'm going to go anyway.' So I called Remington Peters and I asked them, 'Can you identify when shells were made and maybe what lot?' I told them what I wanted to do. They said, 'Yeah, we can do pretty good at it.' 'If you bring a shell, how long will it take you?' 'Twenty-four hours!' (laughs) I called Ed and I said, 'I'm going to Pine Bluff. I think they can get close.' Ed said, 'Well, you don't leave here without ME. I ain't going to have ANYBODY from Sugar Land, Texas, showing up the Houston Police Department!' (laughing) That's what he told me.

So he got in the car with me and we went to Pine Bluff. Pine Bluff narrowed it down and told us when it was made. Those shells were made within the last six months. They were shipped to a lot of different places but the places I was interested in were from Lafayette, Louisiana to Sugar Land, Texas. Lafayette, Lake Charles, Orange and right on down the way. It was a long shot - a REAL long shot. But by the time we got there and were fixin' to trace it down, we had Mary Lou in for interviews in Lafayette and we had an informant that had talked to Mary Lou. He gave us a statement that Mary Lou had admitted to him that she had orchestrated the murder. So we had enough for an arrest warrant. We arrested her and brought her back to Fort Bend County. And sure enough, as a result of all that, when we told her what we had and told her about the tape recording we had from the informant and her tape recorded admission that she was part of it, she gave us a statement. So we didn't have to go to every store. But in the statement was 'Where did you get the shells?' She got them in Beaumont, Texas.

GOODSILL: And you could have tracked them down!

TAYLOR: I would have found it! It might have taken me a while, but I would have found it. And we went to Beaumont, building the case, and at the Wal-Mart store in Beaumont, we looked at the book and there it was, Mary Lou Anderson and her driver's license number, where she bought them .25-caliber shells on the way over to kill her parents. So that was a really unique deal. The end result is she was tried for murder and given the death sentence.

GOODSILL: How about the other case, that happened in this Courthouse?

TAYLOR: The other case was a guy by the name of Tom Stearnes. And I'm telling you about murder cases. A whole lot of what we done was narcotics stuff. We did a LOT of narcotic investigations as time went on. In '72, it was major crime and that was basically what we did. A lot of the major crime turned out to be narcotics related, so we wound up working the cases.

1974, a young man by the name of Tom Stearns was murdered. They found his body in the south part of the county, in the woods. I was working a case in Sugar Land against a known crook, and my suspect was a guy by the name of James Russell. James Russell wound up robbing a Radio Shack out on the freeway. The manager of the Radio Shack, Tom Stearns, identified him in a line-up.

Now Jan Jones, at that time, worked for Harris County Sheriff's Department. I was working with Jan on that robbery. He spent the last thirty years of his career working for the Stafford Police Department and was the Assistant Chief when he died, about three years ago. What happened was, Tom Stearns could identify James Russell as the one that robbed his store. They were coming up on trial and the day before the trial, before Tom Stearns would be identifying James as the person that robbed that store, Tom Stearns turned up missing. He just vanished. We thought we knew who we were looking for and why, but we looked and looked and looked and we kept turning up dead ends. Nothing -- we had ABSOLUTELY nothing. So this drifted on for a year, year and a half or so, and we worked sometimes until midnight. I told Jan, 'You know, you give Harris County a bad name.' He said, 'I did?' I said, 'They go home at five o'clock! You could be in the middle of a search warrant, and all of them, and five o'clock - that was it. See ya! Time to get off.' Jan Jones didn't do that. He stayed with you until you blew out the candle. Later on Bonny Krahn was looking for somebody to go to work for him in investigations, I told him, I know one from Harris County, that if you can get him out here, he'll be a good one for you. And sure enough, he interviewed Jan Jones and hired him, and Jan went on to make an OUTSTANDING employee. Really good.



Earnest Taylor and Task Force Investigator Joe Prejean with over 600 pounds of marijuana

One of the things that made this case interesting was that for a long time we had nothing, for a year or two just nothing. We thought we knew who it was but we couldn't get nothing. Two years later, we had a girl that was doing time in the penitentiary, call us and say, 'I have information about the Tom Stearns murder case. If y'all can help me, I'll give you the information.' To make a long story short, we went to talk to her, she give us all the information, told us how it happened. And in her statement she told what was done and us who it was. She said they picked Tom Stearns up outside of his apartment. They waited for him and when he got ready to go to work, they grabbed him, put him in the trunk of the car and then drove him out to the wooded area out there and shot and killed him. But she said while they were going out there, Tom Stearns was trying to kick and holler. They wound up going back to the trunk and what he was trying to do was to strike matches to figure out some way to manipulate the latch of the trunk so that he could open it and jump out. She said he struck several matches trying to figure out how to do that.

We didn't think much about that then but after we got the statement, I told John Ferrell, a guy who worked for the Sheriff's Department, "We'll find that car. There MAY be a chance that there's fingerprints in that car.' Because fingerprints do go away but nobody washes the underside of the trunk of a car. 'We'll find that car and dust it for fingerprints. And if we can find Tom Stearns' fingerprints inside of the trunk of James Russell's car, then we're on the road.'

So we took off and we found it. We traced it from where it was sold and we found it in San Antone. Poor old black guy had it in San Antone, bless his heart--it just scared him to death when we told him what we wanted to do. He thought we were going to accuse him of murder. It took one of us a little while to convince him that we were not going to do that. We got the car, and before we even dusted for fingerprints, we opened the trunk. And guess what's right there by the latch? SOOT from where he had struck matches and was trying to see to manipulate that latch. My WORD, look at this! So we took it, photographed it and then I put John in the trunk and closed the trunk. He struck matches on the other side of where it was, raised the trunk back up and took a picture of that. The unique thing was when the trunk went up and you looked at that trunk deck, here is a soot mark right by the latch. And it's perfectly round. Now how could it be perfectly round? The only way that it could have been a perfectly round soot mark is that the trunk deck was down. It had to be in a down, locked position for that soot mark to be perfectly round. Had it been up then it would have been tear-dropped.

That's the reason John got back in the truck. He struck one on the other side and held it up there and it was perfectly round, just like the one on the other side. So we photographed them and then we scraped that off so we could send it to the lab and they could tell us if it was a soot mark and not crayon or whatever.

There were no fingerprints. As time went on, we got Russell arrested and went to court. I remember the jury was on my left. The defense counsel for Russell told me -- of course they are not going to give you any credit at all--Andy Briscoe is who it was, from Houston. But he said, 'Officer Taylor, you're telling the jury that that's a soot mark. A round soot mark? That it had to be made with the trunk down? Would you show us on this ashtray how that could be possible?' We had thought about that before then and I took the trunk of the car outside of the courtroom. Not the actual trunk but one just like it - same year model, same color, same everything. When he said that, the prosecutor, Fred Felcman, said, 'Judge, if it please the court, Captain Taylor has the trunk of a car just like the one in question and he'd be happy to demonstrate WITH the trunk, instead of on an ashtray that is completely and totally irrelevant to anything.' Of course that was agreeable. And here I am with a trunk, I got it on the witness stand and held it up like this, and one of the guys came up and helped me. I took a match, struck it and held it up to one side and sure enough, the soot hit it and made this pretty tear-drop shape. I laid it down and I got on my hands and knees, struck a match and held it up to the other side and it was perfectly round. I raised it up and showed the jury. You could tell the jury was just SO--they went (gaspng noise). That sucker was convicted right then. He was done for.

I thought that was a real interesting criminal investigation. The only thing that limits you in criminal investigation is your imagination. A lot of people have unlocked greater and better things, but back in those days, that turned out pretty good.

The sad story is that as a young man James Russell was arrested in Sugar Land for petty offenses for a long time, off and on. I'm talking back when I was working patrol -- from stealing bicycles, breaking into coin-operated machines, those type of things. His mother's name was Irene and everybody called her Mamarene. She loved him so much that she was there to save him and chastise us. We framed her little boy. Her little boy wouldn't do anything like that. 'I don't know why you police officers are always picking on my boy.' I think sometimes that if she had took a belt and wore him out, and explained to him that there are consequences for what you do, maybe his life would've changed.

Maybe he'd have taken a different route in life than he did. But every time, EVERY TIME, she took up for him and accused US being wrong, and would bail him out, bond him out, do whatever she could. Well it went on from petty theft to burglary, then to rape, robbery and then to murder. And he got the death sentence on the trial we're talking about.

He went to the penitentiary on death row. The trial was in '77 and in 1991 he was put to death. Six months later, Mamarene died of a broken heart, I KNOW it was a broken heart. Sad. The VERY person that she loved SO so much, she probably played a major role in him being who he was. Through her undying, blind love, she didn't have what it took to make sure he understood there are consequences for what you do. I've used that several times in talking to people and explaining to them that sometimes you have to be hard or cold. Maybe my experience in law enforcement made a little more rigid with my kids. I was HARD on my kids. I was bound and determined I didn't want them to wind up like some of the kids I've seen.

Mamarene, bless her heart, she was a sweet gal. I liked her and when James wasn't bad, well we visited and I'd talk to her. But when something happened and we would arrest him, we were bad guys again.

GOODSILL: Speaking of kids, you've told us about your two girls. Did you other children?

TAYLOR: I have a son who was born in '72, Clayton Earnest. He is now Real Property Manager for the City of Sugar Land. He lives in Sugar Land. One of my girls lives in La Vernia, Texas , right outside of San Antone; the other one lives in Kempner, up there by Killeen. They're in the military ministry and stationed in Fort Hood. They are all a blessing to my life and my grandkids--I've got nine grandkids. Oh my word, they are something else! (both chuckle)

One last little thing I thought was very unique in those years. I believe it was '85. I was sitting in my office and got a call that there was a bank robbery. Gulf Coast Savings and Loan was located over in the shopping center, right across from the police department. We got a call about a robbery over there and of course we ran over to Gulf Coast Savings and Loan. And sure enough, it had been robbed. It was a lady in her early to mid-thirties and a young man, probably sixteen to eighteen years old.

The unique part about this is that, at that time, my wife worked at the Sugar Land Employee's Federal Credit Union--and it was located in that hallway that went through the shopping center. If you went into the Sugar Company offices today, I think the hall is still there, but you could walk from the front all the way through to the back and out the back door. The credit union was on the left side at the back. Gulf Coast Savings and Loan was in the front part on the right side, probably no more than a hundred yards apart. When the robbery happened, my wife was working one hundred yards from there and I wanted to make sure that they were all right. So I run out the door and run down to the Credit Union and they were all right. I said, 'Gulf Coast Savings and Loan has just been robbed. Y'all need to lock your doors and make sure that no one comes in for a little bit, until we can clear the area.'

I turned to leave and grabbed the door, my wife said, 'Well, what did they look like?' And I turned around, and I'm thinking to myself, my wife is interfering with 007, in an investigation. I'm after bank robbers here, and my wife wants to question me! And I said, 'Margie, it was a woman about 35 years old and a young man about 16 to 18.' I turned and grabbed the door again, and she said, 'Well, what are they wearing?' HOW could she be interfering with 007 like this? This is just not real!! I said, 'Margie (exasperation in his voice), she was wearing this and her hair was like so and the young man was wearing a leather coat, about 5' 6".'

I'm thinking maybe this will satisfy her and I can get out of here and get on with my work. I grabbed the door to leave, and she's 'It was Diane Welch!' I said, 'WHAT?!?' And she said, 'It was Diane Welch.' And of course, I did the proper thing; I chastised her for not telling me THAT to start with! Why wouldn't she tell me--give me this information? I said, 'How do you know it was Diane Welch?' She said, 'She used to be a member of the Credit Union. She used to work for Imperial. And I saw her and that boy run down the hall a while ago.' Their window looked right out at the hall, and they ran down the hall.

To make a long story short, we carried Margie over to the police department and we downloaded pictures from the driver's license, and sure enough, that was Diane Welch! We got a warrant, found out where she lived and we went and arrested Diane Welch and this young man. It's going to get interesting here in a minute. I'll tell you why. We arrested them, put them in jail and charged them with bank robbery. We had plenty of evidence. The ladies at the bank identified them so it was kind of an open-and-shut case. Everything is going good. I think it was 1985 but you can put the political stuff together and you'll figure it out.

Once they were convicted--and they play it out, incidentally--we don't follow it all the way up and down the line unless they go to court and call us to testify. They never called and I never thought anything about it. It was a done deal. We had done our deal. All we had to do was testify if we had to. Well, I'm sitting in the office and I got a call. It was the National Enquirer. The person with the National Enquirer told me who they were and said, 'We're looking for someone who had anything to do with the investigation of the bank robbery of Gulf Coast Savings and Loan, and the arrest and conviction of Diane Welch.' I said, 'Well, I did. You're talking to the person who was responsible for that investigation.' They said, 'OH! Well, did you know that then-district attorney of Fort Bend County Bill Meitzen got a call from then presidential candidate Bill Clinton and convinced him to give Diane Welch probation, because she is Clinton's sister. (laughing) Do you believe that! She's a half-sister.

GOODSILL: Wasn't THAT interesting!

TAYLOR: I don't think they said Bill Meitzen. I think they just said the District Attorney of Fort Bend County had received a call from presidential candidate, Bill Clinton. And got his sister--they said sister, but as it turned out, she was a half-sister--probation for bank robbery. And I said, 'No, I didn't know that.' And they said, 'Well, that's what happened.' And I said, 'Well, how do you know that happened?' And they said, 'Oh well, we had a confidential source.' They didn't know that. You know how all that stuff goes. But they said that's what happened. That Bill Clinton called him and got his sister probation on a bank robbery. And I said, 'Well, if that's what happened, you need to talk to the District Attorney because I'm not aware of that. ' I didn't know that that had happened at all. It didn't matter. I had no communication about that at all. I hung the phone up. Now think back to what I told you a while ago. Where's Bill Clinton from?

GOODSILL: Arkansas.

TAYLOR: What part of Arkansas? Hope. Where I was born and raised! (both laughing) Now, can you imagine what would have come out in the National Enquirer HAD they have known that?! 'Ernie Taylor, long-time boyhood friend of Bill Clinton investigates the case!' They'd have had us old buddies and everything else. I laughed but I never said a word. I just left that one alone because I'd have wound up in the National Enquirer if I'd said anything! (both laughing)

GOODSILL: That's a GOOD one!

TAYLOR: And nothing ever come of it. All they were doing was digging up stuff.

GOODSILL: But you can see how things get twisted around!

TAYLOR: Oh, yeah. And you see what a small world this is. I never knew Bill Clinton. I'm six or seven years older than he is. We knew some of the same people, and when he talked about Hope, Arkansas, I knew exactly what he was talking about. The same guy that taught him basketball taught me. My mother and daddy are buried from here to that window from the Blythe family. [Blythe was Bill Clinton's birth name - his father died 3 months before Bill was born. His mother remarried and Bill took his step-father's name] I never knew Bill Clinton, but I guarantee you, if they would have found out I was from Hope, Arkansas, I would have known him. The National Enquirer probably would have had a half-dozen people from Hope, Arkansas saying, 'Oh yeah, I remember. Ernie Taylor and Bill Clinton--

GOODSILL: They used to go fishing together!

TAYLOR: Yeah. (both laughing)

GOODSILL: Did you used to fish?

TAYLOR: Do I fish? Oh, absolutely!

GOODSILL: Did you do any fishing in Sugar Land or Fort Bend County?

TAYLOR: No. I fished on the coast. We do that now. We fish, hunt and travel. This last year we got one of the things off our bucket list that we've been planning for a long time. We drove to Alaska. Two and a half months we were on the road and we just thoroughly enjoyed it. Had a wonderful time. Seen a lot things. Fished in Alaska. We got that one out. I don't believe I'd drive up there again. I'd love to fly up there. But Margie and I travel and when we travel, it's kind of like going down the road like a tree full of hoot owls. We're looking in all directions, trying to find somebody to talk to, visit with and have a good time. So we thoroughly enjoyed driving through and back, but it's very expensive, driving, because it's a long ways. You can fly up there and rent a car and do much better financially.

GOODSILL: But you had the experience.

TAYLOR: I wouldn't take the world for that experience. It was great.

GOODSILL: Well, I think we should wrap it up. I think we've done well!

TAYLOR: I hope so.

Interview ends

Biography - Chief Earnest B. Taylor, Retired

Chief Taylor joined the Sugar Land Police Department as a patrol officer March 15, 1969 at which time there were 4 employees. At the time of his retirement in 2003, the department has grown to 124 sworn personnel and 34 civilian personnel. Chief Taylor rose up through the ranks and has served as a patrol officer, detective, captain, assistant police chief, patrol commander, acting police chief and was appointed as Chief of Police in 1992.

In 1972, while still employed by the Sugar Land Police Department, Chief Taylor was assigned the then "Fort Bend County Major Crime Task Force" and eventually served as Director of the unit for over nine years. During that time the Task Force investigated a great number of major criminal offenses, including several high profile murder cases. Then "Captain" Taylor became the only official Task Force pilot and in addition to his other duties, flew the two Task Force plane on countless law enforcement related missions.

Chief Taylor is a graduate of the F.B.I. National Academy at Quantico, Virginia and has also completed thousands of hours in other law enforcement education and training.

Chief Taylor holds a Master Peace Officer certification with the Texas commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education and is a member of numerous law enforcement organizations, which include the Texas Police Chief's Association, the International Chief's of Police Association and the Harris County Area Chief's Association.

Chief Taylor is a past board member and past president of the board for the Fort Bend County Regional Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse. He is past president of the Texas Law Enforcement Intelligence Units Association and the Southeast Texas Association of Identification and Investigation. Chief Taylor served on the board of directors for the Texas Police Chief's Association, the Fort Bend County Narcotics Task Force, and the First Colony Management District.

Chief Taylor was selected by the 100 Club of Fort Bend as the very first Outstanding Officer of the Year for Fort Bend County in the year 1976. He has received numerous other honors and awards and has been featured in two true detective magazines for his work on the widely publicized Thomas Stearns murder case in 1974.

Chief Taylor was the driving force behind numerous accomplishments of the Sugar Land Police Department. One of which includes the design work and overseeing the construction of the new state of the art Police and Municipal Courts building, which was completed in March 1996. He guided the Sugar Land Police Department to become the first law enforcement agency in Fort Bend County to achieve national accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies.

Chief Taylor retired in March 2003 after 34 years of honorable service and is enjoying life with his wife, three children and nine grandchildren.