FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Karl Baumgartner**

Interview Date: 10/02/2015

Interviewer: Jane Goodsill

Transcribert: Marsha Smith

Location: Sugar Land, Texas

19 Pages

Transcription

GOODSILL: Karl, you have some interesting family history. What would you like to start with?

BAUMGARTNER: My paternal grandfather was Milton D. Baumgartner. He was born in 1874 and grew up on the family farm in Halstead, Kansas, about fifty miles north of Wichita. His father, Abraham Baumgartner, emigrated to the U.S. from Switzerland. They were Mennonites who left Europe to escape religious persecution.

GOODSILL: Can you tell us a little bit about the religious persecution?

BAUMGARTNER: It was very severe; physical abuse, hangings. It was a period in Europe that included very severe physical persecution.

GOODSILL: Tell us something about the Mennonite religion so we can tell how it was different from the prevailing religions.

BAUMGARTNER: Nobody in my immediate family was raised as a Mennonite. They left the church including my grandfather, so we didn't grow up in the religion. I know it was very fundamentalist, similar to the Amish with a very strong fundamentalist belief in the Trinity. My grandfather, Milton, had 12 brothers and sisters, who lived on the 300-acre family farm in Halstead.

GOODSILL: When did Abraham emigrate to America?

BAUMGARTNER: Abraham, my great grandfather, arrived in America around 1840. The Mennonites spread across the country and a lot of them went to Missouri and then to Kansas. They were farmers. We went to a family reunion there about 8-10 years ago and there were still Mennonite communities in rural areas where they drive horses and buggies and they still wear very distinctive clothing, shawls and dresses. They didn't attend public schools. They are schooled in their own community. For years they had no electricity and no automobiles. They believe in a very simple life, confined to the Mennonite community. They are disciplined with a strong work ethic and very high integrity. They have eschewed many of the vices of today's culture.

There was a Mennonite community near the little village of Fairchilds south of Rosenberg

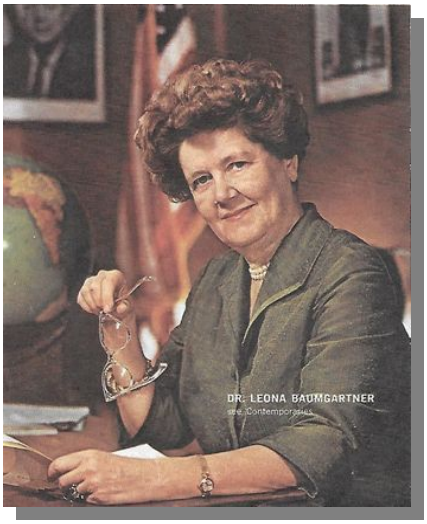
which got wiped out by the 1900 hurricane. In El Campo there is also a strong Mennonite community where I have good friends, Dave Schmidt's family, with whom I have worked on conservation projects over the years.

I don't know how Granddad left the church. He grew up in the wheat fields with his large family, all doing their farm chores. Somehow, he ended up getting a PhD from the University of Chicago and taught German in college the rest of his life. I used to spend a lot of time with him. He taught me about gardening and fishing and outdoor life and we never talked about when he was growing up. I wish we had.

GOODSILL: What would you have liked to have asked him?

BAUMGARTNER: When I was in high school one of my responsibilities was to take him shopping once a week for his groceries in Stillwater, Oklahoma where I grew up. He was in his late 70's then. I wish I'd asked him how he left the farm in Halstead, Kansas. How he got to college in Chicago. Why he was inspired to get a PhD. What it was like growing up on a farm in Kansas with 12 brothers and sisters. What were his mom and dad like, Abraham and Barbara? What it was like to leave his religion?

GOODSILL: How could he afford it?



Dr. Leona Baumgartner, photo from *Modern Medicine* November 9, 1964

BAUMGARTNER: Yes. And one of Granddad's brothers, Dr. Will Baumgartner, became a prominent professor whose daughter, my dad's cousin, became Commissioner of Health for New York City. Dr. Leona Baumgartner, you can google her up. A Kansas girl, she held that position in the 1950's, at that time the highest government position held by a woman in the United States. She got a PhD at Yale, and after retirement she taught at Harvard. She would show me around New York City when I was living there in the late 60's, and we would walk the streets-- Broadway, Greenwich Village, lower Manhattan. She invited me to her home at Washington Mews, an historic private gated street built from two-story stables during the 1830's. In those days I never realized what a privilege it was to spend time with her.

GOODSILL: That's quite an amazing story! I didn't think women had too many positions in the government at that time. And what was the name of your grandmother, Milton's wife?

BAUMGARTNER: Sarah Hill Baumgartner. My father, Frederick M. Baumgartner, was born in 1910. He grew up in Indianapolis. After receiving a PhD from Cornell, he worked for the US Fish and Wildlife Department for a few years and then taught at Oklahoma State University for the rest of his career. His specialty was ornithology and zoology. I remember his students gave him a 16-guage shotgun for Christmas one year.

GOODSILL: No wonder you are so interested in wildlife.

BAUMGARTNER: Yes. My mom, A. Marguerite Baumgartner, also received a PhD in zoology from Cornell. She and Dad met there in graduate school and they spent their lives together enjoying the outdoors and teaching about the natural world, birds in particular.

GOODSILL: Your mother was an academic as well? Tell me a little bit more about your mother.

BAUMGARTNER: She grew up in Rochester, New York. Her parents were William Heydweiller and Amelia (Karle) Heydweiller. Mom got her undergraduate degree at the University of Rochester, in English and German.

GOODSILL: Why do you suppose she'd learn German?

BAUMGARTNER: Her family was German. I took two years of German in college but didn't retain it. Then she went to Cornell to get a PhD in zoology. Mom was a tremendous naturalist and environmentalist. She worked on her doctoral thesis studying Tree Sparrows at Churchill, Hudson Bay, Canada. She went there by herself on a freight train from Michigan to Canada, and lived one summer with a missionary family among Native Americans and Eskimos.

She was also a wonderful humanitarian; worked with Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts and different youth groups and would have them out to our property to see her bird banding

operation and talk about nature. I remember she would sometimes invite youth groups of black children out to our house which was unusual in those pre-integration days. She wrote a weekly column about birds in the Oklahoma City *Sunday Oklahoman* newspaper for years. She banded birds all her life, catching them in live traps and placing tiny aluminum identification bands on their legs and documenting their life history with the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Washington DC. Pre-computer record keeping. She had her PhD but never allowed people to address her as doctor.

GOODSILL: I have seen your book, *Oklahoma Bird Life,* by Frederick M. and A. Marguerite Baumgartner. That's something to be proud of!

BAUMGARTNER: Have you heard of Roger Tory Peterson? There are two main ornithologists in the history of the United States: John James Audubon, and Roger Tory Peterson, who with his Field Guides introduced the public to the study of birds during the 1900's. This is a letter from Mr. Peterson to my mom and dad following the publication of their book.

GOODSILL: This letter was written April 30, 1993. I'll read it. (reading)

"Dear Marguerite and Fred, What a magnificent book! From now on *Oklahoma Bird Life* will be a role model for any state book to emulate. It is not only a tribute to your Cornell background under Arthur Allen, the first professor of ornithology, but it also is a celebration of your life's work in Oklahoma. It is academically thorough and precise and at the same time, so well written that it is free of the usual academic stiffness... Sincerely, Roger Tory Peterson"

GOODSILL: That's quite a tribute. And in addition to that, they had children?

BAUMGARTNER: My eldest brother, Theodore (Ted) Baumgartner; William Baumgartner; me; and my sister, Barbara {Baumgartner} MacAlpine, the smartest of the lot. We were all born in Stillwater, where we grew up.

We were raised on twelve acres out in the country, a simple home that didn't have indoor plumbing initially. I spent almost all my time outdoors, exploring, hunting, fishing. We had

a big one-acre garden. My first chore began at age six, I had to walk ¼ mile to my neighbor's farm in the late afternoon just before the sun went down and bring back a gallon jug of milk which was still warm because he had just milked the cows. It cost $.25 a gallon. I got my first 22 Rifle when I was ten. The school bus ride in the morning took an hour and a half because it was a 30-mile ride through the back country roads picking up the country kids on the way to school.

My time was spent outdoors. I didn't watch TV. I would bet I hadn't watched a total of ten hours of TV in my life before I left for college.

COLGATE UNIVERSITY AND THE EAST COAST

GOODSILL: So how did you get to Fort Bend County?

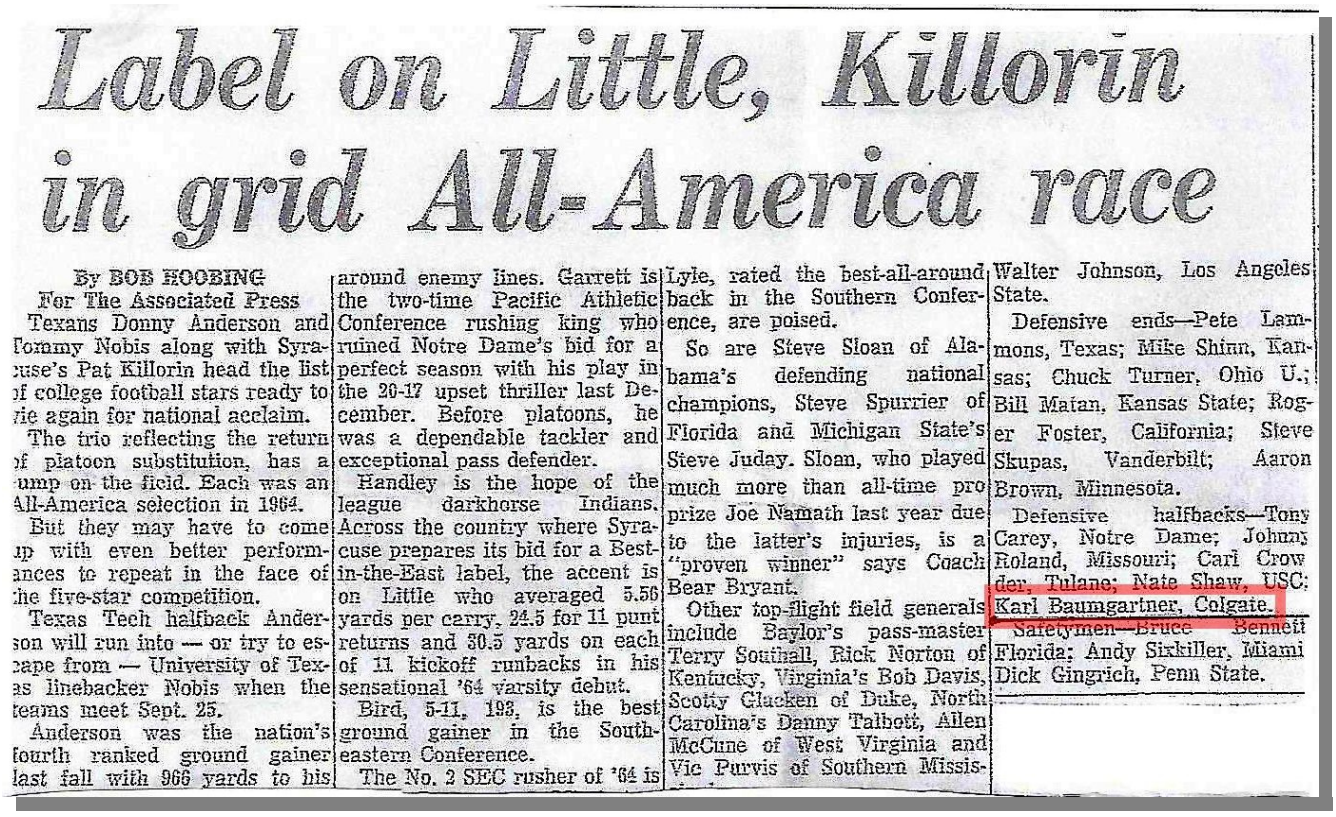
BAUMGARTNER: By myself. From Stillwater High School I went to Colgate University in upstate New York. It was the only college I applied to and they offered me an academic scholarship. In those days you went by bus or took the train. Stillwater didn't have passenger train service and I remember going to the train station in a little town called Perry Oklahoma at 6:00 a.m. with my mom and dad and girlfriend to see me off. The sun was just coming up. The train pulled into the station. I was the only ticketed passenger getting on. The conductor, a large black man, hopped off the train and walked up to us. "Where are you going, young man?" Syracuse, New York, I said. "No, Chicago, you've got to change trains in Chicago," Mom said. "Chicago," I said. And off I went.

Freshman year at Colgate University

After a couple days I arrived in Syracuse and took a bus fifty miles to Colgate. It was September, 1961, and already chilly there in early evening. I was wearing wheat jeans, a black t-shirt, black loafers and white socks, standard Stillwater teenage apparel. I went to my assigned dorm and met my new roommate, Allan Depew. We were walking to the

Student Union for our first Colgate meal and I learned that you couldn't enter dining hall without a jacket and tie. I didn't have a jacket and tie. I was told that I could walk back downtown and the Men's Shop clothing store would still be open. I didn't have any money. Dad had three children in college simultaneously. Allan loaned me $35, we walked together to the Men's Shop and returned and had dinner with my new classmates.

Going to Colgate changed my life. They increased my scholarship when the coaches found out I could play football. I had worried about competing academically against all these



Label on Little, Killorin in grid All-America race

By BOB HOOBING
For The Associated Press

Texans Donny Anderson and Tommy Nobis along with Syracuse's Pat Killorin head the list of college football stars ready to vie again for national acclaim.

The trio reflecting the return of platoon substitution, has a jump on the field. Each was an All-America selection in 1964.

But they may have to come up with even better performances to repeat in the face of the five-star competition.

Texas Tech halfback Anderson will run into — or try to escape from — University of Texas linebacker Nobis when the teams meet Sept. 25.

Anderson was the nation's fourth ranked ground gainer last fall with 966 yards to his

around enemy lines. Garrett is the two-time Pacific Athletic Conference rushing king who ruined Notre Dame's bid for a perfect season with his play in the 20-17 upset thriller last December. Before platoons, he was a dependable tackler and exceptional pass defender.

Handley is the hope of the league darkhorse Indians. Across the country where Syracuse prepares its bid for a Best-in-the-East label, the accent is on Little who averaged 5.56 yards per carry, 24.5 for 11 punt returns and 30.5 yards on each of 11 kickoff runbacks in his sensational '64 varsity debut.

Bird, 5-11, 193, is the best ground gainer in the Southeastern Conference.

The No. 2 SEC rusher of '64 is

Lyle, rated the best-all-around back in the Southern Conference, are poised.

So are Steve Sloan of Alabama's defending national champions, Steve Spurrier of Florida and Michigan State's Steve Juday. Sloan, who played much more than all-time pro prize Joe Namath last year due to the latter's injuries, is a "proven winner" says Coach Bear Bryant.

Other top-flight field generals include Baylor's pass-master Terry Southall, Rick Norton of Kentucky, Virginia's Bob Davis, Scotty Glacken of Duke, North Carolina's Danny Talbott, Allen McCune of West Virginia and Vic Purvis of Southern Missis-

Walter Johnson, Los Angeles State.

Defensive ends—Pete Lammons, Texas; Mike Shinn, Kansas; Chuck Turner, Ohio U.; Bill Matan, Kansas State; Roger Foster, California; Steve Skupas, Vanderbilt; Aaron Brown, Minnesota.

Defensive halfbacks—Tony Carey, Notre Dame; Johnny Roland, Missouri; Carl Crowder, Tulane; Nate Shaw, USC; Karl Baumgartner, Colgate.

Safetymen—Bruce Bennett Florida; Andy Sixkiller, Miami Dick Gingrich, Penn State.

Associated Press pre-season article, 1965

allegedly brilliant eastern guys with prep school backgrounds, but I outworked them my freshman year and learned that they didn't have an edge. I majored in philosophy, corresponding with my professor for the next fifty years, and played four years of ball.

I played left defensive halfback. My junior year we allowed just 67 points scored against us, second best in the country to University of Arkansas. Head Coach Hal Lahar was also from a small town in Oklahoma, and we bonded. When he passed away, from over one thousand

young men he had coached during his career, he selected me as one of six pallbearers which I served with pride. Over the years I came to realize that football was my most important formative experience. I still see and talk regularly with my Colgate buddies after all these years.

I took a leave of absence following my sophomore year; I had been going to school for twelve straight years and I was tired of it. With three Oklahoma buddies we headed west. In November I was working on the Southern Pacific Railroad in Compton, California, the only white guy on an all-black crew, the day President Kennedy was shot. Everyone then remembers exactly where they were the day JFK was assassinated. We shut down the yard but had to remain on site. I was disturbed but the others were indifferent and we spent the rest of the day in a boxcar rolling dice.

By Christmas, I decided Colgate wasn't such a bad deal and headed home. Hitchhiking through Wichita Kansas I was standing at the highway with my thumb out, a car sped past me, slowed down, backed up and picked me up. It was good friends of my parents returning from a trip who recognized me out on the highway and drove me the final 150 miles right to my home in Stillwater. I spent Christmas there and took the greyhound bus back to upstate New York and returned to Colgate.

Following graduation I went to grad school, and moved to New York City where I went through a rigorous two-year executive training program with Chase Manhattan Bank at their downtown head office. After completion I got to go up to the 20th floor and shake hands with David Rockefeller who was president of the bank then, and had the opportunity to talk to him for about 60 seconds. Of course, it meant nothing to him but I never forgot it. He was a very nice man.

Then I quit and went to work on Wall Street. After a few years I decided I wanted to leave New York and get back to the Southwest and go into business for myself. I got an assignment in Dallas and one thing led to another and I decided to go into the manufactured housing business; I was familiar with the industry structure from some of the financing work I had done on Wall Street.

STARTING A BUSINESS

When I got to Dallas, I formed a corporation with the acronym ITNY Corp, which stood for

"I'm Through with New York." I went into business in Rosenberg, Texas.

GOODSILL: Why Rosenberg?

BAUMGARTNER: I wanted to be in a smaller community outside of a big growing city. The mobile home business is basically a rural business. I considered Rosenberg, Huntsville, and Greenville up near Dallas. I picked Rosenberg, without really knowing anything about the town except its population.

GOODSILL: What year did you come here?

BAUMGARTNER: 1973. When I arrived, Highway 59 came out from Houston and ended in Sugar Land. The highway stopped and you had to come to Rosenberg via Highway 90-A. The first night I stayed at Homer Norton's Motel in Rosenberg on Avenue H. I didn't know anybody in town.

GOODSILL: Manufactured housing is mobile homes? How has it worked out, picking Rosenberg, Texas?

BAUMGARTNER: Eventually it finally worked out well. It was a long saga. In 1973 the mobile home business was booming. My new company was the 9th mobile home retailer in town. I didn't know it but it was the end of the boom and the start of the bust. By the end of the year there was a national oil embargo, the Dow Jones stock market index crashed falling over 50% from 1000 to 450. (Today the Dow is 17,000.) The prime interest rate hit an all-time historic high of 12 %, the first time in history it had broken through 10%.

Financing dried up for people wanting to buy a mobile home. Sales collapsed. You've got to offer financing to your customers; they can't pay cash. Mobile home purchasers have only two basic questions—How much down and how much a month? By the start of 1975 I was the only dealer left in town. The other eight folded.

GOODSILL: When were you born, Karl?

BAUMGARTNER: April 2, 1943. I was 29 when I moved here. It's interesting to compare

today's requirements to start a business versus what it was in 1973. Today with the capital requirements, bonding requirements, educational requirements and government red tape you could never get off the ground with what I started with.

I had a very small amount of money, $3000, which is one reason I chose the mobile home business. You could get into business with very little capital and borrow against your inventory. I located a small lot and rented it at the corner of Avenue I and Third Street near downtown Rosenberg.

GOODSILL: What did you do on that small location? Do you have to have models that people can come look at?

BAUMGARTNER: Yes. It was only 100 x 120 feet, actually too small a location to run a business like this -- that's what everyone told me. You could only put five display models on it plus a little office. I talked a lender into giving me a $50,000 line of credit to purchase inventory. The landlord charged me one month's deposit $350, plus first and last month's rent, $700-- total $1050. I paid Marcos Ortiz to level and spread gravel on the lot--$1000. I paid a young guy from Needville to build and erect a sign--$700. After two weeks, I had $87 left in the bank.

I needed a sale. I didn't take a day off for six months.

Mobile Factory Outlet Closing

Twenty-five years later I sold my business to a large Fortune 500 company based in Detroit, Michigan. I had formed a cartel consisting of seven other mobile home dealers located around Texas. We acted together in pooling our inventory purchases, manufacturer's rebates, financing deals and so forth. We met regularly, compared notes, vacationed together around the world with our families for twenty years. Working together and comparing financial statements was an important key to success. Most mobile home dealers don't survive for too many years.

My exit strategy was to combine our sales and sell our companies as a package deal.

I was the youngest cartel member and the only one with Wall Street acquisition experience, and as president I had to guide my buddies through the process from start to finish. The negotiations and documentation took six months. We flew to Detroit for the closing. It took three days. Each member was required to sign separately because we each had separate corporations, and there were a dozen lawyers involved.

I sold my company on March 6, 1998. I remember that day well. They made me sign last because they wanted me to monitor each closing of the other guys. It was a long day, and I didn't finish signing until 9 p.m. After I signed, we headed for the bar.

GOODSILL: So, you are no longer in that business.

BAUMGARTNER: I own mobile home parks now, which is a different kind of business. Rental property, not sales; land for collateral, not manufactured homes; more stable cash flow.

GOODSILL: You've had to learn a lot as time went by.

BAUMGARTNER: I thought I knew quite a bit when I started it, but actually I was clueless.

FAMILY

GOODSILL: Should we mention your wife's name and your children's names?

BAUMGARTNER: I got married, I had kids. My wife's name is Carol. We met at a club in the Galleria area in Houston; I asked if she wanted to learn how to play backgammon. We dated five years, got married in 1981. I wanted to be financially stable before I married and that took five years.

We went to New York City for our honeymoon. It was a rare snowstorm in Manhattan. It

was fun but Carol slipped on an icy sidewalk in the Upper East Side and twisted her ankle.

At first, I was working hard trying keep my business afloat and get it established, but we traveled some and had time to party with Terry and Harriet Geick and Marty and Peggy Ryan. I traded a used mobile home for an old fishing cabin at Matagorda which we rehabilitated and spent quite a bit of time there.

I used to love offshore fishing. One morning Carol and I hooked up in Matagorda with Don Schwartz, my lawyer, and some of his friends and we followed their boat in my 22-foot Mako out through the mouth of the Colorado River and went out about 30 miles to my favorite spot Texaco Rig 528. It was so beautiful in those days. No other boats around, out past the blue water line where the water color turns from green to blue and we were fishing in about 125 feet of beautiful clear cobalt blue water that you could see down into 30 or 40 feet deep.

Carol and I were catching fish. We loaded the ice chest up with red snapper and headed back, leaving Don's boat behind. On the way in we started chasing shrimp boats and got lost. I wasn't sure whether I was on the east or west side of the mouth of the river and we were running low on gas. No GPS, no radio, no binoculars, and this was way before cell phones. I decided to get in closer and hug the shoreline in case we ran out of gas. We did. The waves pushed the boat onto the second sandbar and we got out, threw out the anchor, salvaged the ice chest and dragged it up on the beach.

We started hiking down the beach heading east which I hoped was the right direction. I was feeling concerned, but Carol was in her 20's and was not to be bothered. She spotted an old plastic headgear lying on the beach, a construction worker's "hard hat", and said "Oh what a cute picture. Put it on and I'll get a picture." I declined.

We kept walking. Of course, we survived just fine. We spotted an old cabin hidden about 100 yards off the beach back in a thicket of salt cedars. We followed tractor tire tracks back to the cabin's front door. There were bobwhite quail dusting along the trail. We knocked and an old man appeared at the door and he was not happy to see someone else intruding on Matagorda Island. An oil company employee, we labeled him "Jack the hermit." He wanted us off the island. He got on his ham radio and reached a pilot who flew his little plane in from Port Lavaca and landed on the beach and picked us up and flew us to a landing strip near the mouth of the Colorado. We thanked him and offered reimbursement

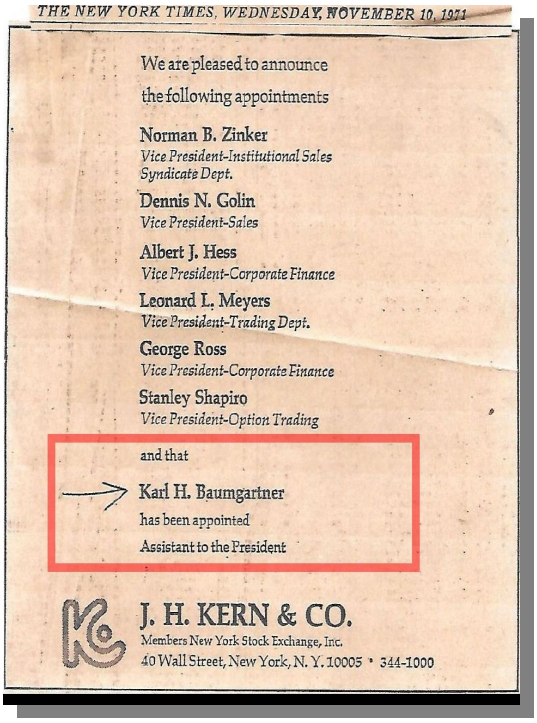
but he thought Carol was pretty and all he would accept was some red snappers from our ice chest. Carol and I hitchhiked from the landing strip back to the cabin. It was a good day, but our last trip in the Mako.

We have three children, Jaclyn (1981), Michael (1984), and William (1991).

The Baumgartners – William, Carol, Karl, Jaclyn, Michael

I was in Boy Scouts with the kids. Scouting was important in our family when I was growing up, my brothers and I were all Eagle Scouts. I was proud that William earned his Eagle. I coached athletic teams, YMCA football, Lamar Little League baseball, Lamar Soccer. The kids spent a good amount of time growing up at Matagorda. Jaclyn spent one semester studying in London. Two summers we rented RV's and drove across the US, one year through Colorado and Montana to Yellowstone National Park, one year across the south to Disney World in Florida. We followed along with companions Carlton and Jeannine Mayo (owners, CJM Soil Supermarket) and their three children Amber, Candace and CJ about the same age as our kids. Carlton led the way in their RV.

In 1999 we flew to New York City for a short vacation to let the kids see the world. One day we took the subway downtown to the Wall Street area and walked by One Chase Manhattan Plaza, the site of my first job in New York City. From there it was just two blocks to walk over to Wall Street. We came to the corner of Wall and Broad, a famous historical intersection with a landmark office building, 40 Wall Street. It was the site of my final job in New York City. Looking around surrounded by my family, I couldn't spot the big office building. I said, I know this is the right block, but I can't see the building where I worked. Michael was saying, Sure, Dad, Sure. Then I spotted the building. The Donald Trump Building. Trump had acquired it. And renamed it. Today he's in litigation with federal and state officials over his mortgage at 40 Wall Street.



THE NEW YORK TIMES, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 1971

We are pleased to announce
the following appointments

Norman B. Zinker
Vice President-Institutional Sales
Syndicate Dept.

Dennis N. Golin
Vice President-Sales

Albert J. Hess
Vice President-Corporate Finance

Leonard L. Meyers
Vice President-Trading Dept.

George Ross
Vice President-Corporate Finance

Stanley Shapiro
Vice President-Option Trading

and that

Karl H. Baumgartner
has been appointed
Assistant to the President

J. H. KERN & CO.
Members New York Stock Exchange, Inc.
40 Wall Street, New York, N. Y. 10005 • 344-1000

The New York Times announcement, November 10, 1971

CIVIC ACTIVITY

GOODSILL: You've been involved in some nonprofit work over the years. And you've been on some boards. Why don't you tell us about that?

BAUMGARTNER: I was on the board and an officer of Fort Bend County Museum Association for a number of years, Richmond-Rosenberg Local Government Corporation, and Fort Bend Subsidence District. Texas Master Naturalists is a big avocation.

GOODSILL: Are you a teacher?

BAUMGARTNER: I do some instruction with Texas Master Naturalists.

GOODSILL: Do you have a garden of your own?

BAUMGARTNER: I have fruit trees. I spend a lot of time on outdoor habitat restoration. One of the big problems with the environment and the ecosystems all over the country is that plant life is not what it used to be. There have been so many foreign plants introduced into America. They are usually referred to as 'exotic invasives'. These plants don't really belong in North America but they have been brought here since colonial days. The government introduced some of them not knowing any better. Some of them have come over in boats and people have brought them over.

They have no place here and are ruining the ecosystems and the native habitat. I spend a lot of time trying to eradicate the invasive stuff and re-introducing the original natives.

GOODSILL: Where do you do that?

BAUMGARTNER: I do that on my property in Fort Bend County, Wharton County and Jackson County. And we're doing a volunteer project in Rosenberg at Seabourne Creek Nature Park with a statewide organization called Texas Master Naturalists. The Coastal Prairie Chapter has a 20-acre site where we are doing a native prairie restoration project and I spend a lot of time there. I'm considering granting one of my properties designated to the State as a Conservation Easement, creating a property that that can never be developed and will remain in its present natural state in perpetuity.

The Texas Master Naturalist chapter is a good illustration of how local volunteers can benefit a community. Seabourne Creek Park is a large 165-acre municipal park owned by the City of Rosenberg. The property was purchased by the city in 1994. They put in a lake and a five-acre shallow wetlands impoundment, and then it basically sat around dormant for fifteen years. Practically no one in town was even aware of it.

In 2009 the Master Naturalists got involved. We were looking for a project and proposed to the city that we help manage the park. There were no trees along the paths or around the lake, no fish in the lake, the wetlands pond leaked and wouldn't hold water. The place was barren and never used. I was president of the chapter at the time and talked to the City Manager and arranged for a $20,000 grant to get us started.

We planted fifty 12-foot-tall oak trees around the walking path and introduced over twenty different species of trees around the lake, all volunteer labor. We installed an irrigation system and designed a massive entrance sign. It was like overnight the park started to shape up.

The next year we reapplied for an additional grant. We herbicided the weeds and invasive plants and started introducing little bluestem and other native plants in the 20-acre site set aside for a restored prairie. We stocked the lake with bluegill sunfish, channel catfish and bass. Over the next few years, we built two butterfly gardens. We renamed the park Seabourne Creek Nature Park which is what the city labels it today. We designed and installed interpretive signage pointing out different nature features in the park. We hired Mennonite heavy equipment operators and resealed the bottom of the wetlands pond so that it holds water, and instead of a dry weed patch it is now a shallow water pond holding ducks, sandpipers and herons, frogs and other aquatic wildlife.

We transformed the park. Seabourne Creek Nature Park was a barren almost vacant facility and is now is a heavily used site that is popular with residents and guests, older people, families, kids, scouts. Every year it becomes a more valuable asset for the city.

GOODSILL: It sounds like a lot of work. Physical, manual labor.

BAUMGARTNER: It is. It's fun. I like it. The Master Naturalists like it. It beats being indoors.

GOODSILL: Why did you choose Fort Bend County Museum as an interest?

BAUMGARTNER: Some people are interested in history and some people are not. I've always had an interest in it. And as you get older, you become more and more interested in it. It was something I thought was worthwhile and I wanted to volunteer there.

GOODSILL: I understand you are going to start taking some interviews for the Oral History Committee. What kinds of things do you feel drawn to do?

BAUMGARTNER: I'm particularly interested in seeing what it was like 30, 50 or 70 years ago, growing up in Fort Bend County. I've had one interview to date—I just took my first interview-- and it was very interesting to me. The man I interviewed, born in the 1930's, grew up on a cotton farm over in Beasley, living in the house where he was born, with no indoor plumbing. They had a one-acre garden and lived off it all year long. He quit school in the 7th grade. A lot of old-timers got only a grade school education. It was really interesting, listening to him talk about Rosenberg and these small towns in Fort Bend County -- the way they were then compared to today. My interest is capturing a historical record that people can look back at to understand life back then.

I've been here in Fort Bend County for 40 years and it's changed a lot. The County Fair is going on right now. I remember when the County Fairground was off of Avenue H in Rosenberg. They built a Kmart there but the Kmart is gone now too. They moved the fairgrounds from the middle of Rosenberg to Highway 36 south of town.

At the fair in the 1970s you would know half the people that you saw. Now you can go to the County Fair and it's a huge zoo of people from Houston and the suburbs and you don't know anybody. We are a suburb of Houston but when I started living here Rosenberg was its own small community. It had a much different feel.

GOODSILL: Are you concerned about the development that's going on, with your concerns for the environment?

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, not locally. It's standard development now, municipal development, with typical regulations. I have a little place on the San Bernard River, west of Needville. I was out there this morning trying to get my water well working. It is all cotton fields on the way out there, ten or twelve miles west of town.

My son and I were talking about what it was going to be like in 25-30 years and I said it will be all houses; it's going to be like Cinco Ranch. In the 1980s the Cinco Ranch, just north of Rosenberg, was still a 15,000-acre working ranch with cattle on it. Jimmy Banahan was the foreman and he used to come to the Old Briscoe Road Grocery on Highway FM723 and have coffee with his buddies. He wouldn't recognize Cinco Ranch in any way today. Now it's a web of concrete streets and another city. The same thing will happen between here and Needville in the next twenty years. It's a lot better place to live now than it's going to be then, in my opinion.

GOODSILL: I hardly recognize the turn-off to go to the main library from the Southwest Freeway. It used to be a just a little road with fields on all sides, and now every corner has development on it. I keep thinking, 'Where am I? Where is the turn?'

BAUMGARTNER: Yes, the community has changed so much. There was much more civic involvement then. I joined Lions Club in the late 1970's just to meet more of the people in town. At that time the organization was a lot younger group with young business people, but it's dwindled and evolved into an aging congregation.

In those days you knew the owners of most of the businesses in the area and most had family roots in the community. It was before the Brazos Town Center mall on Highway 59. Downtown Rosenberg then was the Third street and Avenue H area and the businesses there.

Schaeffer Pharmacy was owned by Henry Wertheimer, a wonderfully friendly man who served as president of the Lamar School Board for years and now has a local middle school named for him. Dostal's Jewelry was founded by Bill Dostal's father and is now managed by Bill's son Chris. Danziger's Shoe Center, whose proprietor Leon Danziger, was a holocaust survivor who escaped to America with a tattoo on his arm from the concentration camp. Arrendondo Furniture was founded by John D. Arrendondo, patriarch of the Rosenberg Hispanic community whose daughter, Lupe Uresti, [see interview on County Oral History Web Page] became Mayor of Rosenberg. The Brazos River bridge was named after Mr. Arrendondo.

Geick Auto Parts- Milton Geick would help out community members during the severe Houston financial depression in the 80's. His son, Gary, become a longstanding Justice of the Peace, and son Terry owned Old Briscoe Road Grocery with his wife Harriet. First National Bank is led by founder 's son J.E. Junker. Civic leader Jack Moore, son of long-time Richmond Mayor Hilmar Moore, always friendly and helpful in providing counsel to community newcomers re legal structure and protocol of their businesses. Travis Reese retired from teaching and opened an office in the old Rosenberg Bank building and became a prominent realtor and community leader and spearheaded the Rosenberg Railroad Museum project.

Rude and Son's on 3rd Street was the only sporting goods store in the area. I remember during the 1980's I went there to buy a new shotgun. They didn't have the model I was

looking for but I wanted to buy it from them and not the new store in town, Walmart, so I went to Walmart and priced it out and went back to Rude's to order it. When I told Raymond Rude the competitor's price, he was embarrassed to tell me that Walmart's retail price, due to their buying power, was lower than his store's wholesale cost.

Recreation and access to the outdoors has changed tremendously. We used to get our 12-guage and hunt doves right on the edge of town. Or go down to the coast and fish all day offshore without running into almost any other boats. This was before the Matagorda jetties were built. The mouth of the Colorado River was just a pretty little river trickling through the sand into the Gulf of Mexico.

In the 70's my good friend Monce Flores, who owned a TV repair shop, and I were both footloose and fancy free and owned our own businesses here and whenever the wind laid down and the seas were flat, we'd head offshore. I recall one time we ran up on a fleet of about 30 Cuban shrimp boats. The ships looked like little rusty tubs and we thought the Cubans were crazy for coming all the way across the Gulf of Mexico in them, and they thought we were loco to be out there alone in a 19-foot boat. Monce started talking in Spanish to them, we gave them some beer and they started chumming for us, throwing dead fish and shrimp off the side of their boats which attracted all kinds of large game fish, sharks, ling, kingfish, Spanish mackerel. Monce and I caught so many fish our arms got too tired to reel them in. Monce passed away two years ago and I attended his funeral in Bay City. His family asked for remembrances and I said his funeral music should have included the song I Did It My Way.

When I was courting Carol at Matagorda, we would catch so many fish offshore the ice chests would be full and spilling over, and the bottom of the boat would be covered with red snapper. Today the limit for red snapper in offshore water is two! Go out 30 miles for two fish? Two! Times have changed and it is not all good.

GOODSILL: Thank you for this interview, Karl.

Interview ends