

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSIONER

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Patricia Louise Pickler Hebert**

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Interviewer: Karl Baumgartner

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BAUMGARTNER: Today is June 18, 2019. My name is Karl Baumgartner and I am interviewing Mrs. Pat Hebert in Richmond, Texas as part of the Oral History Project of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission. By way of introduction Mrs. Hebert is a long time community leader in Fort Bend County including president of the Fort Bend County Museum Association and many other activities. This is an entrepreneurial story. She and her husband, former Fort Bend County Judge Bob Hebert, threw caution to the wind many years ago and formed their own company which has positively impacted the community in its own right.

Pat, what is your full legal name?

HEBERT: Patricia Louise Pickler Hebert.

BAUMGARTNER: Your place of birth and date of birth?

HEBERT: Memphis, Tennessee, August 25, 1941, which was also my dad's birthday.

BAUMGARTNER: That's a nice coincidence. Were you born and raised in Tennessee?

HEBERT: I lived there very briefly but because of the war we ended up moving when I was a baby to Cleveland, Ohio and then we moved to Mobile, Alabama, then to Arkansas, then back to Memphis. Eventually we settled in Houston.

BAUMGARTNER: Your dad was in the service?

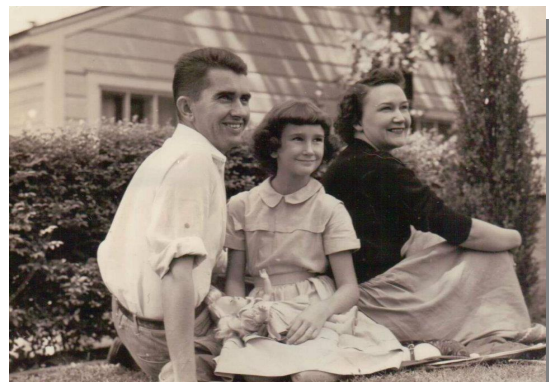
HEBERT: No he was not but he worked on airplanes up in Cleveland during the war and after that he took a job which took him down to Mobile.

BAUMGARTNER: What was your family history? Were they from the south?

HEBERT: Very much a southern family. My dad's family were all from the hills of Tennessee; literally Tennessee hillbillies. My grandmother lived in Memphis her entire life. I had one grandmother from Texas.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you have siblings?

HEBERT: No siblings, an only child.



Pat with her parents

BAUMGARTNER: And what were your parents' names?

HEBERT: My mother was Louise and my father was called by his initials, O. L. His real name was Otha Levi and he did not like either name and so he always went by O.L., or, with the last name Pickler, he went by Pic.

BAUMGARTNER: Who were your grandparents?

HEBERT: My dad's parents were Otha Levi Sr. and Mary. My maternal grandparents were Margaret and Leon Kennedy.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have close relationships with your grandparents?

HEBERT: Yes, especially my mother's mother. She was an important influence for me as well as my daughters.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you remember when was she born?

HEBERT: She was born in 1899 and she died in 1990.

It's as if there were two different versions of her. When I was growing up she lived on an acre farm where she grew all her vegetables. She had a cotton patch to the side and she raised some cotton. She always had a cigarette dangling out of her mouth. She married a divorced man with children which back in 1917 was kind of unusual.

Then as the years rolled by the great grandmother that my daughters knew was a totally different person. Heaven forbid if she smoked a cigarette. She was just delightful. She was much braver than I; she would keep all her great grandkids at her home and they would spend the night with her and she would have little Jell-O cups ready for them and they would do spaghetti, fried chicken and all that good stuff.

BAUMGARTNER: That is a pretty fortunate influence for children.

HEBERT: My girls as well as the other grandchildren and her great grandchildren just adored her; just adored her. My great aunt lived with her outside of Memphis so the two of them just really adored those kids, my girls as well as their cousins.

My grandmother and my mother were both calendar keepers and everything was kept on calendars and notebooks, so I can look back at my grandmother's notes. I've got a tub this big with calendars. I got my grandmother's journal and I can look to see what she planted -- like, they planted in '32, what they planted, how many rows she planted.

I keep what you call a family journal and I can go through that and for any given year will tell you what I did and when I did it. I try to keep for each year what Bob was involved in, and it is about this thick. I don't think I have told Bob about it but I have told the kids. I have marriages, movies, addresses, because you will forget that over the years, and it will be a great reference for my kids.

BAUMGARTNER: That is pretty neat.

Did your mom work?

HEBERT: No. My great aunt had started working as a buyer for Sears probably back in the twenties. She was pretty much the breadwinner for the family.

BAUMGARTNER: My mom got a PhD and wrote newspaper columns about birds every week but she never worked at a regular job in her life, and looking back on it hardly any moms did then.

HEBERT: They did not. That was my only experience for female employment then, my grandmother didn't work and my mom didn't work.

BAUMGARTNER: What was your childhood like? You moved around to several places.

HEBERT: We moved around a lot and as a child that moved around a lot, I did not make many friends because I was always the new kid on the block. A new school would start and I would get zoned to another, so pretty much I was a shy child until I grew out of that.

I remember Girls Scouts as a Brownie, probably up through junior high school. Getting on the bus and going on field trips, doing crafts, going to camp.

BAUMGARTNER: Nature stuff or outdoor stuff?

HEBERT: It would be more indoors, like a museum. And we went to summer camp for a week or so. My big adventure one time at camp was what seemed like my first broken back. We had made a rope swing going through the cabin. We got a rope over it and we started swinging on that rope, over concrete floors, and the girls were taking turns swinging, swinging and swinging. It was my turn and I was swinging and swinging and the rope broke.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh my goodness.

HEBERT: I landed on my tailbone and by the time I got home I could barely walk.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you remember much about school in those years? What were some

differences between then and now?

HEBERT: One of my most vivid memories was in a little school when we lived in Allendale, a small town outside of Memphis. I was probably in the second grade and I am left-handed and my teacher believed, literally, that left-handed people were the product of the devil (laughter). I didn't want to write like a right-handed person and wanted to turn my paper to the side and I was not allowed to do that and she would come and hit me.

BAUMGARTNER: She would come and...

HEBERT: She would come and hit me with a ruler. So I certainly couldn't do that, that was the rule and I had to learn to write like this with my paper perfectly straight. So I had to learn how to write upside down right to left instead of writing left to right. I had to write upside down or I would get hit.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow; corporal punishment for being left-handed. Elementary school has changed. Did you go all the way through school there?

HEBERT: I ended up starting high school in Memphis and then moved to Houston my freshman year. We bought a house in Bellaire and I went to Bellaire High School. I was still so shy and I didn't come out of my shell until after graduation. When I finished Bellaire I went away to college.

BAUMGARTNER: Where?

HEBERT: University of Texas. I loved it and came out of my shell and enjoyed being there. It was kind of sink or swim time for me.

BAUMGARTNER: Was it a large school already?

HEBERT: It was considered a huge school even back then. It had about 19,000 kids. I started in 1959 and when I started it was one of the largest schools but that enrollment would not be considered large today.

BAUMGARTNER: Was it close to 50-50 female, male?

HEBERT: I don't remember that. One thing I do remember was that I had grown up in segregated schools. South Memphis, Little Rock, Ball High School would have been my high school. So I had grown up in the segregated south. When I was at Texas I was in class with black people and I went to coffee after class with black people, yet they could not go to the movie the same time I could and that made no sense. Several of us marched, literally up and down the strand with signs.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you participate in that?

HEBERT: Absolutely. I think I helped lead it.

BAUMGARTNER: That was a little early in Texas but some of the southern schools were integrated at that time.

HEBERT: University of Texas was. My high schools weren't. It was getting rocky in Little Rock. I had friends even in junior high who were already looking for private schools to avoid integration.

BAUMGARTNER: What did you major in at UT?

HEBERT: I majored in education. I kind of made up my mind that I can stay in this shell forever or come out. My freshman year I was in what they called an experimental class. There were six hundred people in the lecture hall which was then broken down into groups of about twelve, and each group of twelve met and came up with a semester project. We met at the professor's house and he gave each group a time to schedule their own session with him. He said I am going to need a liaison; I can't talk to all six hundred. My hand went up. He said ok Pat you are my liaison for this semester. I communicated with him the whole semester on our project, what we were doing, and at the end of the semester he told me that of all his students I would have been the last one he would have guessed to raise my hand. By my sophomore year he called me one day and said Pat you need to come and lecture. So I went and lectured to one of his classes one day.

BAUMGARTNER: You forced yourself to change.

HEBERT: I forced myself to change. Looking back on it I loved to learn, I loved being in class, and I loved taking notes and I was an excellent note taker. I would probably say I was an average student and I can't say I excelled but I was a good B student

BAUMGARTNER: When did you meet Bob?

HEBERT: I met Bob my junior year on a blind date. We were engaged two weeks later and married six months later. He was in the Navy and had been sent there for officer candidate school, but he couldn't be married and remain in that program and we thought we might as well get married which we did and they shipped him out to Hawaii. I followed a few months later after he got settled. We got married in 1962.

BAUMGARTNER: Where did you live from the time you got married to Bob?

HEBERT: The first year was in Hawaii. I came back a little bit early, Bob was to get out like

in November and I was expecting our first child. We were able to get Bob home for the delivery in October. He got out of the Navy and we started our family; actually our first real life time as a family; had a little girl. Eleven and a half months later had another little girl. We had been in the apartments so about that time we bought our first house in the Alief area in 1966.

FIRST HOME

That is kind of where the story starts. Bob likes to tell it. He was sitting on the couch drinking his beer and I said you know the Homeowners Association Group of our subdivision is trying to start a Homeowners Association. Why don't you go to the meeting, we own our home now, we need to get involved. He got up and went, came back of course as president of it.

BAUMGARTNER: That's Bob. Why does Bob come back as president? Nobody especially knew him then. I am sure it is a familiar theme in your family history.

HEBERT: He had the leadership quality that people recognized.

BAUMGARTNER: Charisma, certainly.

HEBERT: I guess so. He is just a natural born leader.

BAUMGARTNER: What is a Homeowner's Association? What does it do and how often did they get together?

HEBERT: Well, different Homeowners Associations are all different, I think. The one I am in now meets once a year, but regarding the one back then I don't really remember much. If there is any entrance to the subdivision they try to make sure that it is kept up, and the sign maintained. Water and garbage pickup is usually separate.

BAUMGARTNER: It is not really a social activity?

HEBERT: No. It is just administrative duties of the neighborhood. Most of the time associations are the ones that enforce the by-laws that have been established for the subdivision.

BAUMGARTNER: You mean like deed restrictions?

HEBERT: Yes. The Homeowners Associations are the ones that enforce the deed restrictions. That can get sticky. It has occasionally in the subdivision we live in now, but not back then.

Bob was president and we started to get more involved. From there we decided we needed a fire department so Bob and several guys started a volunteer fire department. We then needed a local newspaper so I started a newspaper.

BAUMGARTNER: How do you start a newspaper?

HEBERT: Back then, mimeographed it. I would type and mimeograph and run it off in my garage and hand deliver it to my neighbors.

BAUMGARTNER: Cool. That must have been fun.

HEBERT: I did that until I delivered my third girl. About that time a friend of ours named Bev Carter was starting a newspaper.

BAUMGARTNER: I remember Bev. In Sugar Land or Stafford...

HEBERT: Alief, but it evolved to Stafford, the Southwest Star. I did not sell ads in mine; mine was strictly gathered news, things that were going on in the subdivision.

BAUMGARTNER: She was a character.

HEBERT: She was one of life's challenges. She spoke her mind. I got out of that business, delivered the last edition in January right before the last baby was born.

BAUMGARTNER: What was Bob doing then?

HEBERT: He worked for Xerox repairing Xerox machines. He worked for Allstate as a claim adjuster; Xerox worked out at Nassau a lot.

BAUMGARTNER: You mentioned that he and some neighbors started a volunteer fire department?

HEBERT: Back then we had a couple of houses that burned and it took a long time for Harris County to send fire trucks out here. We had a few issues where a sheriff was needed.

BAUMGARTNER: I guess that was way before EMS? (Emergency Medical Service)

HEBERT: Yes. And we had to give them directions to get out there. We started the volunteer fire department and they got a truck and parked it at a closed-down service station. We dispatched out of the house, had a red phone for the private line, and the fire alarm calls would come into the house. We set up the fire telephone line; there was one in our house and one in Margaret Smith's house, her husband Bob was also one of the founders of the volunteer fire department. The red phone would ring and we would get the address of the

fire.

BAUMGARTNER: So the fire line had its own direct line, right?

HEBERT: Yes it had its own line.

BAUMGARTNER: Of course that was before you dialed or could utilize the technology of today.

HEBERT: Yes. I had my list.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have to dial the operator?

HEBERT: No, the operator would call into this line and say we have a fire. I had my list to call and Margaret had her list to call and whoever we called that was closest would go get the fire truck.

BAUMGARTNER: What if you were out fighting a water or sewer problem when they called?

HEBERT: There were a lot of volunteers and there were some firefighters that were off duty who were hired by Houston so we had backups to go get the truck and show up.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you and Bob ever have to go out on fires?

HEBERT: Bob fought them a lot. They also did some EMS calls back then.

BAUMGARTNER: How long did that participation go on?

HEBERT: It went on for several years and they eventually built a fire station down Boone Road, where the volunteer fire department was finally able to have a real dispatcher and a bunk room for people that were there. This was where they housed the fire trucks.

BAUMGARTNER: Was there much camaraderie within the fire department?

HEBERT: Oh yes. They trained together, they worked together and many times in a difficult situation. There was one time; my daughters even remember this, that there were three houses on fire—all at the same time! One started and they all caught on fire.

BAUMGARTNER: I guess that created relationships that endured for a long time.

HEBERT: Yes. That is something we did as we raised our kids. My daughter Patsey still has fond memories from when we were involved in the volunteer fire department and driving

through Jack-in-the-Box one time and saying we need fifty hamburgers for our fire members. She still likes to tell that story.

BAUMGARTNER: Patsey, Shelly and Cindy were your three girls. What years were they born?

HEBERT: 1963, 1964 and 1968.

BAUMGARTNER: That was before you and Bob started your company and became self-employed. You were busy raising your family.

HEBERT: I was becoming involved. I was elected PTA president before Patsey started kindergarten.

BAUMGARTNER: What school?

HEBERT: Boone Elementary in Alief. Bob was on the school board and I was PTA president.

BAUMGARTNER: That was part of your first involvement with volunteer leadership?

HEBERT: I guess so. Looking back on it I think neither one of us were like oh gosh we are going to go out and volunteer in everything we see. We did not have that mindset, it just happened. It was like we needed a fire department because houses were burning down and it was too far for Harris County. Things came up that we had to do something to make things happen.

BAUMGARTNER: And you became president of the PTA as Patsey was about to start school.

HEBERT: Yes. They elect officers for the next year in the spring so when the school starts you have your PTA in place. I don't remember the exact circumstances of becoming involved. I do remember that Cindy was two weeks old when I took her to her first meeting which I think was a PTA planning meeting. Cindy grew up literally going to meetings.

BAUMGARTNER: How long was your involvement as president?

HEBERT: I was probably president for only one year, but I stayed room mother and involved in it for many years.

BAUMGARTNER: Was Boone a good elementary school?

HEBERT: It was awesome. It was brand new and exciting times. I am still good friends and

am in contact with the principal.

BAUMGARTNER: What were the teachers' and parents' relationships like then?

HEBERT: They were very good. I knew Patsey's teacher, and Patsey is a talker. She lasted almost a week before the teacher had to call me. I knew this lady and she said we have to do something. Patsey felt like she knew all the stuff, she knew her colors and her letters, she knew all that and in her mind she didn't need help. We had a very good relationship, we had successful fairs to raise money for the PTA and we had the games and vendors and it was really good.

BAUMGARTNER: Your experience with the teachers was favorable all the way through?

HEBERT: Oh yes.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you think that it is different now compared to the closeness that you had?

HEBERT: I do know what has changed is back then I would say that the majority of the mothers did not work, so they were able to devote a lot more time to the school to volunteer and to do these special programs than probably the parents today.

BAUMGARTNER: No doubt. Parental involvement can be so important and so many women don't want to work because they want to be involved with their kids.

HEBERT: Yes. It is very hard to do both. We started our company when Cindy was four and I had to put her in daycare for the first time and it was very painful for me and for her.

BAUMGARTNER: You hear criticism now that the relationship between the teachers and parents is not what it used to be. Does it seem that there was more respect given then to the teachers by the parents? My daughter is a school teacher in elementary and she has expressed the opinion that some parents are discourteous to the teachers.

HEBERT: In those days parents showed respect to the teachers. I always had a good rapport with all my kids' teachers.

BAUMGARTNER: Going back to your childhood we talked a little about Girl Scouts being a positive experience for you. Does anybody do Girl Scouts anymore?

HEBERT: They do. My oldest daughter went all the way through and my youngest daughter had been doing scouts since she was two years old. Patsey went all the way through and Shelly went so far and Cindy had pretty much been in scouts since she was about two

because Patsey started as a Brownie and I was the leader. She went everywhere. She had done the campout at Bear Creek when we did the two week day camp.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you attend that?

HEBERT: I was the leader.

BAUMGARTNER: What did you do at day camp?

HEBERT: We did crafts mostly, played games; we would have the whole day set out. It was our Brownie den. That was back in the '70s; I happened to come across one of the day camp patches the other day.

BAUMGARTNER: Growing up with the girls, was that mostly a mother's role?

HEBERT: I would say probably mostly me. In the beginning Bob was working all day and going to school at night on the GI Bill so he was not really home a lot.

BAUMGARTNER: Where was he going to school?

HEBERT: I believe then part of U of H downtown. He was gone like four nights a week going to school and I was a stay at home mom. This was in 1971, a little before we started Eco Resources in 1973.

DECISION TO START A COMPANY

BAUMGARTNER: Then you started the company.

HEBERT: We started the company.

BAUMGARTNER: How did that happen? It's a monumental decision.

HEBERT: We had bought the house, and had the baby in 1968, and then in 1972 Bob had gotten to know several of the neighbors, and one of them was on the subdivision's water district board. It was being poorly managed according to him and he came to Bob, who had taken another job in between which is another story, and he said, Bob I think you can manage this water district better than it is being managed. You have good business sense.

And from that little beginning is how the company started. We looked into it, and decided to start a business: a Water District Management Company.

We needed capital. We sold our house to get money to start the business, and rented a town home. It was sort of a crazy time. Borrow a little bit and take a chance. When you sell your

house and go live in an apartment with three babies to start something, you have to hope that it is going to happen. Number one you have to have an understanding wife, and I was in it from day one. But I was teaching at a daycare when we started, teaching four- year olds and I wasn't sure the company was going to make it, so I would teach in the morning and go work in the office in the afternoon.

We started Eco Resources on April 1, 1973. It was literally Bob and I and we had one other lady that helped in the office and we had one laborer and a certified operator.

BAUMGARTNER: Explain what a Water District Management Company does.

HEBERT: A water district is also commonly known as a MUD District [Municipal Utility District.] It is created by a developer who wants to subdivide a property, develop it and sell the lots. He creates a legal entity authorized by the State of Texas called a MUD that can raise money by selling bonds to fund the infrastructure for the property and do everything needed to bring water and sewer to a service area—typically water plants and sewage plants and lines needed to service them. The developer or the MUD hires consultants, an attorney, an engineer, financial advisor and an operating company.

That is where our company came in. We would be the operating company, the water district management company. We do not build the water and sewer plants and create infrastructure and build the systems, but once they are up and running an operating management company is needed to take care of the infrastructure. We manage it, and we do the billing.

BAUMGARTNER: Rather than Bob finding an executive position elsewhere, you started a new entity and you and Bob created a management company.

HEBERT: Yes. We named it Eco Resources.

BAUMGARTNER: You had to hire operators and field men and also office staff I suppose for billing management. Eco Resources would hire guys in the field?

HEBERT: Oh yeah. In the early days we hired this young man named Lanny Brown, and he was our laborer. When I interviewed him I said tell me about your last job. Well I got fired for doing wheelies in the parking lot and I said that is good enough for me. He started the next day. Much of our responsibility was repairing lines that were broken. Most of our water main breaks started about six p.m. when people got home from work; they started the washing machines, and they started the shower and that kind of stuff. So we would go from break to break to break till about midnight when everybody went to bed and we would get up and do it again.

That was the introduction and pretty much our life for a while. Lanny's first night was in the middle of an intersection and we had to take out an intersection.

BAUMGARTNER: That means shut it down temporarily?

HEBERT: Oh yeah. We had to jackhammer it out. Lanny Brown was on that jackhammer and we went late into the night; you get down there and you have to shut off valves, you have to turn off the water wherever the break is. You clean it up and get the right size clamp on it, get the backhoe out. There is a lot to do with a water main break. We all worked to twelve or one o'clock in the morning. Bob said if he shows up in the morning at eight o'clock we have ourselves a good guy.

BAUMGARTNER: As far as your responsibilities, what would you have to do?

HEBERT: I did what was basically needed. For instance, I did interviews and hiring.

BAUMGARTNER: For example:

HEBERT: This lady shows up and she said I want to work outside; I really don't want to be in an office. And I would say what experience do you have? Oh, I kept a cylinder, like one of the big empty oxygen cylinders that I kept it in my office that they have to handle within a water plant. I said can you handle this cylinder and she said yes, and she went over there and checked it out; you have to handle them, you have to hook them up and all that good stuff. I said are you certified and she said I have my D License-- there are different levels of licenses, D is your first one. I said where did you get the license and she said it was in prison. What were you in prison for and she said manslaughter and I said ok explain that. I was defending a family member and the man died. I said ok and she ended up being one of our best employees.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow.

HEBERT: She stayed with us or one of our spin offs for many, many years until she died a few years ago.

In those days there was no dispatch system, no radios, and no nothing. We would get a phone call about a water break and I would send Lanny to that address wherever it was. He would figure out what he needed to do, if he needed to get the backhoe or whatever. If we got another call I knew where I had sent him so I would hop in my car and go find him and say ok Lanny this is your next stop. Over the years we got radios and I would just radio him.

There would be times that Lanny would be on the backhoe digging, we had a break and a

lot of times it is hard to tell where, you've got this much area that is wet and sometimes you can see where it is bubbling up and you say ok we are there. Other times you do not have bubbles you just have wet. Lanny and I, he had the backhoe ready and we would start tapping and it was fifty/fifty on who was right.

I can still see him; he was the finest young man, a very tall black man. I recall when we were operating at Mission Bend and he was making his rounds, if the kids got off the school bus they would just hop into his truck and he would take them to the house. He watched those girls grow up so they knew Lanny and they loved Lanny. One of the neighbors called and said your girls just got out of a truck with a black man. Let me tell you something, that black man will defend them till the day he dies. He has been in their lives since Cindy was four.

BAUMGARTNER: Neat. Win-win.

HEBERT: I remember one occasion back then in particular. We had been in business for a while and had really not had a night off for a fancy night out. We had planned on a dinner out and I got all dressed up, long skirt, heels, babysitter, we are going out to dinner. Then we got a call and dinner was washed out. We had a sewer back up. When you have a sewer back up you have to start working pretty far down the line to find out where it is, where the clog is, to get it pushed out of the way; I am standing out in the middle of a field over an open manhole with a flashlight waiting for flow because that means they got the clog done somewhere.

I tell that to people later on and nowadays it is a little hard to grasp. You did what you had to do. All afternoon until our water breaks started. As I said, all the water main breaks were at night.

BAUMGARTNER: That could be a book that you can write, life with the water breaks. It's interesting. Flash forward, you look at Bob and at his position and all the administrative skill and leadership responsibilities and you don't see him out there looking for a water break.

HEBERT: Jumping in a hole, out in the mud. To take someone a clamp this big or six inch or whatever.

BAUMGARTNER: What was the financial structure of your company? What was the company's revenue source, how does everyone get paid?

HEBERT: There are two ways it gets revenue. One of them is through the monthly water bill that all residents pay who live in the water district. It is based strictly on water usage.

That basically pays a portion of the operation maintenance and overhead cost.

BAUMGARTNER: That is a monthly bill, just like your City of Rosenberg monthly water bill. It is part of the cash flow provided to pay salaries for an operator or engineer or whatever?

HEBERT: Yes, your monthly bill pays for that. The company's other revenue source is from the bonds the water district sold to keep it going to create the facilities -- the plant, the lines, lift station and all those things that they have to do to make a water district. The bonds were sold to have the money to do that. The taxes pay the bonds.

BAUMGARTNER: That is part of the homeowner's annual property taxes.

HEBERT: Yes. That is the MUD tax and the MUD is going to use the tax receipts to pay those bonds off that were used to create the district and pay for the facilities. The operating company, Eco Resources does not set the rates that determine the taxes. The board of each water district sets their own rates.

BAUMGARTNER: Who is on the water district board?

HEBERT: The residents residing in the district will run for office to be elected to the board; literally, it is your neighbors that run the water district. The board does do the hiring and firing for all the consultants that they need, such as the operating management company.

BAUMGARTNER: And the management company, Eco Resources, must also maintain its office staff for billing and office management.

HEBERT: This is before computers. We used punch cards for billing. We hired our operator, laborer, and then we would hire more laborers as we needed them. You had to have a certified operator. This is regulated by state law. All MUDs have these requirements. If you are managing a water district where you've got your own sewage treatment plant and your own water well, you are required to have somebody that is certified in both of those with a certificate to show that they know how to work them.

INDUSTRY CHANGES

BAUMGARTNER: As the company started to grow and continually expanded, I suppose you had to continually add people to your payroll.

HEBERT: We started getting water districts as clients that had so many water meters to put in; with all of the builders I had to process hundreds and hundreds of them. We call water installation "taps." I headed up the tap department. At First Colony I probably handled

every meter installation. You had to install new water meters and oversee the inspections. As we grew we needed a Human Resources Department and I did HR.

BAUMGARTNER: How did the industry change as your business kept growing?

HEBERT: You need to understand back then the operating company was a guy with a backhoe and he would submit an invoice to the MUD that only stated For Services Rendered. They would say I will fix that and submit \$1,200.00 invoice without detail. Bob came in and included time and material, set rate, and you paid this, a very detailed analysis of what that invoice was for. This was new to the industry. Bob basically revolutionized at that point how the MUD business evolved. This is taxpayer's money. They are paying these fees.

We did the record keeping in detail. We provided good records for their accounting system. We managed the bookkeeping to start with; eventually other bookkeeping companies were created by other people and they took over the bookkeeping part. We still were reading the meters and got the data to them but how much money they were taking in was really critical so they knew they would have the data make the decisions.

BAUMGARTNER: It's interesting to see how the industry evolved. You guys were really in the ground floor in the old days.

HEBERT: The way we approached it really impacted the industry. The way we billed, the way we looked at customer service. One of the first things I taught the ladies in our office who received the phone calls on a water bill was this-- I said nobody is ever going to call you and thank you for the water. They are only going to call you to complain. They are going to call if there is a problem so that is why we are here, to problem solve.

BAUMGARTNER: What were the attributes of the women you would hire who would take these problem phone calls?

HEBERT: Generally I would find women, number one, who had patience and willingness to try and help the customer. They also had to understand that if someone calls in and said that their usage is up; their bill is probably too high. We would send someone out to check the meter. When the meter checks out, not a problem with the meter, do you have a leak anywhere? No I don't have any leaks anywhere. Well, is a toilet running or do they have something else running? And the next month they have this high water usage again and you didn't fix it last month. Well ma'am we will go check it again and we try to work with them. Check your toilet, check your sprinklers, check your hose, maybe your hose is flooding your neighbor's yard?

It is one of the things that I did as we got more and more districts and billing. I trained all the people who took calls with billing questions. I trained them how to do the bills, look at their bills, and create the report for the districts. Everything that we did for each Water District board was to provide them with management data--their monthly reports, what the income was, what their expenses were, we had to track all of that. Billing was a big part of what we did.

BAUMGARTNER: When creating an account for a new resident, how did you bill them for a water tap?

HEBERT: We generally had a set fee per connection.

BAUMGARTNER: And there would there be a continuing relationship for monthly billing?

HEBERT: Oh yes. Just because a subdivision was built out it didn't mean that our service stopped. We still have the water lines, your sewer lines, your sewer plants, water wells. All that kept going.

BAUMGARTNER: I guess your company continued to grow as you added subdivisions.

HEBERT: Bob was out there selling, and overseeing, and he would be down the hole with the guys checking on repairs.

We ultimately sold Eco, and when we sold out it was the largest company of its kind in Texas. The important thing was that with these people that I am talking about, we created what we felt like was family. The association with these people that are still in the industry. Most companies out there now are a spin off from Eco; somebody left Eco to do it or somebody went with this other company with Eco roots. We helped create a whole industry that I think helped Houston grow. We changed the way that it was done.

BAUMGARTNER: You and Bob have had a productive life. You have worked for it.

HEBERT: We worked, and we have been very blessed. Some people start off and they know at the outset, this is our path. We started off and said ok and where do we go now? A lot was circumstances -- you need a fire department, ok let's start a fire department.

BAUMGARTNER: It is remarkable to look back at one's life at how some little event that is kind of random can influence your life so much. Somewhere down the line someone came to Bob and said why don't you be in charge of a water district, and it transformed your whole life. I mean the whole path of it.

HEBERT: It really did. And it opened it up.

BECOMING ESTABLISHED

BAUMGARTNER: Did you remain in Alief after your business got established?

HEBERT: We bought a home and lived in Mission Bend. Our life was mostly with kids and work at that stage. It was the Girls Scouts, PTA, pretty much kid oriented, and then we moved to Sweetwater. Both of my older girls were in college and Cindy was finishing high school.

BAUMGARTNER: During that period you got involved in more political activities and civic organizations?

HEBERT: We had been involved in politics starting back in probably 1975. When we had Eco, probably more to the last part of it; we were already supporting and sponsoring non-profits and charity events. I think that goes back to what we felt like was an obligation to give back to the community and help the community out however you could and being more involved with them.

BAUMGARTNER: Was that more of a financial involvement or work related?

HEBERT: It was both. The financial was by sponsoring an event or donating as well as helping with it if they were putting something together or serving on a committee to put an event together or a program.

BAUMGARTNER: How did you get started in the political realm?

HEBERT: We had some friends who were very political. Bill Archer was a good friend. He was a representative in Washington who had stayed there for years and years. He and Bob had put up yard signs in the old days together at our house in Alief. We helped with his campaign so we did a lot of campaign work.

He was a Congressman. He was a nice, nice man. I had forgotten that we were doing politics even way back then, and got involved that way. We had got Bob elected to the school board and we got our feet wet that way. Water districts can become very political.

BAUMGARTNER: How was a water district political?

HEBERT: Water districts can get political when certain groups emerge who want to rule the board and other interests and make it something different. They can get upset about the rates or something, and they are elected officials. It is a political entity.

BAUMGARTNER: When are they elected and how are they elected?

HEBERT: Initially they are appointed by the developer; once the developer board's service is completed, an election is held annually. I think the winners serve for two years or three years, whatever the MUD has set up. They hold elections just like they hold city elections. Everybody that lives in that water district can vote.

BAUMGARTNER: The turnout is very small?

HEBERT: Very small. Back in the day I ran for one in Alief, I lost and I think there were forty one votes. They can get political. They have authority. They can set the water rates, they set the tax rates, and they decide on the capital improvements so they have a lot of power.

When we moved to Sweetwater I liked living there but I really needed more space around me, if that makes sense. They were big houses and they were three feet apart. After selling the company, I told Bob I just really want a little bit more space.

We had started Eco Resources in 1973 and we sold it in 1985 to a company called Southern Municipal Services. Bob had a five year non-compete clause in the sales agreement. We did the non-compete and as soon as Bob was available again we started a second company. Then the same company that bought Eco bought that in 1993.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, they came back and bought you again, your new company. They must have liked what they got.

HEBERT: Buying it was a way to get Bob off the streets and pay him a retainer, so that is what they did.

BAUMGARTNER: All is well that works.

HEBERT: So we put our house on the market. Before we even had started looking, it sold immediately. We had an RV and that is how we lived for a while. I said I want a little bit of acreage and kind of get away from the hustle and bustle and that is how we found the house where we are now. Bob was at a golf tournament and I had a realtor show it to me and I said write up the contract and I will go find Bob to sign it. I took it to the golf tournament and they were having dinner. Somebody asked Bob have you seen the house and he said no, but if Pat likes it we are buying it.

MOVING TO THE COUNTRY

HEBERT: We needed a house. Fortunately we love it and have been there for 29 years.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, you have been there that long? I drive that highway frequently and I

hardly even remember that little subdivision being tucked in there that long.

HEBERT: Oh yes, our house was seven years old when we bought it, out in rural Fort Bend County. We moved out there and could relax in the country and do things we had always enjoyed doing.

We had always been involved at some level with different nonprofits, sponsoring or being involved. I think at one time I was on nine boards between the Museums, Meals on Wheels, just different groups. And during all this time I was very involved with the Republican Party. I have been Precinct Chair for over twenty five years.

Bob had got on the Fort Bend County Museum Association board. And then, as they say, things changed. Jim Adolphus was the County Judge and he had become ill. We had been politically involved for all these years but we did not have any goal to be political; we just helped candidates while helping a lot of other candidates, on a very low level.

When Jim got sick, others started talking to Bob about running for County Judge and he said I am not running against Jim, he is a good friend. Then Jim called him, from his hospital room, and told Bob I can't run, my health will not let me, will you run? And Bob said yes I will. He ran against Annette Hoffman who had been running for four years against Jim Adolphus; we had a very hard primary campaign and we won.

BAUMGARTNER: Bob had a wonderful diverse background to serve as County Judge. I know he served for a number of years appointed as an advisor to the town of Arcola to help them get out of a financial mess, and he served for a while as City Manager of the City of Rosenberg. He had experience seeing first-hand problems of the little towns in the county.

HEBERT: What they faced. How they functioned with the state. He also served on the Brazos River Authority for seven years. He brought a wealth of basic experience. And number one was the entrepreneurial experience. Just a wealth of different backgrounds.

As County Judge, that not only opened up a change on what Bob was doing but it opened opportunities for us to get involved with a lot more of the non-profit organizations. Sponsoring and being on the boards and fundraising for charity events was one of the ways that I helped. Bob said I have raised at least a million dollars for local organizations over various events that I have chaired.

I started the Patchwork of Life Event Program at the OakBend Medical Center in Richmond about five years ago. One of the things I do for them is that we sell squares for \$100 and then I put them together and make a quilt.

BAUMGARTNER: I have seen some of your quilts at different civic events.

HEBERT: Yes there are a lot of quilting bees. I belong to a little group that I actually am having lunch with today. Over the years I have done a lot of quilts that I donated to these different charities.

Bob and Carol Brown, wonderful donors, he is my biggest collector. I think he has ten or twelve. Carol teased at one time we have to buy a bigger house because we are running out of places to hang them. I felt like that was one way I could enjoy playing and making my quilts and giving back. We have been blessed to be able to serve.

And it gave me time to catch up on some things. I had made a promise to my dad when I left UT, I said I will go back some day and finish my degree. Then as they say, life happened; the family and our businesses and we were busy. Finally just a few years ago Bob said you need to fulfill your promise to your dad and go back to school.

I got ahold of the U of H and I said here is the deal. I had classes starting in 1959 at UT and took other classes over the years, probably accumulated one hundred forty hours, and way more than I needed to graduate. The U of H Education Department said let's see if we can make this happen. I started in the fall of 2014 with the first class and not knowing if it was going to work or not, they really worked with me to carve out the hours that I needed.

When I went back to the University of Houston and was taking those courses, it was all online which I loved. I made good grades but not outstanding at UT, I think I was on the honor roll once. Out here when I was doing the U of H I really wanted to make a 4.0 and I did in all my classes.

I graduated in 2015, with a degree in education, so I did a cap and gown.

BAUMGARTNER: You walked across the stage [both laughing].



Cap & gown on graduation day.

HEBERT: I walked across the stage.

BAUMGARTNER: You must have gotten a good ovation.

HEBERT: I did. I had my maiden name on my diploma for my dad.

BAUMGARTNER: That is pretty cool

NORTH FORT BEND WATER AUTHORITY

BAUMGARTNER: Pat, you participate in two other important activities that I would like you to mention, the North Fort Bend Water Authority and Fort Bend County Museum Association. North Fort Bend Water Authority is a big deal and I know you have been involved with it for quite a while.

HEBERT: North Fort Bend Water Authority (NFBWA) is not the same thing as a Mud District like we were discussing earlier; it is called a surface water provider. And there is a third type of entity, the Fort Bend Subsidence District (“Subsidence District”) which was created to reduce subsidence.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Subsidence has been an important issue in the greater Houston area since the 1970’s. Subsidence is a process caused by soil compaction which can result in lowering the ground level which may cause flooding and rising water levels. Subsidence can also contribute to reduced water availability from underground water sources known as aquifers. Through powers authorized by the state legislature, the Subsidence District requires community members to reduce their reliance on groundwater extracted from water wells and to convert to surface water such as rivers and lakes.

HEBERT: The Subsidence District mandated that the community had to reduce subsidence and usage of ground water by thirty per cent by 2013, replacing ground water usage with surface water. NFBWA was created in 2005 by the legislature to meet this mandate from the Subsidence District. It is the function of NFBWA to provide a source of surface water to the northern Fort Bend County community.

BAUMGARTNER: So NFWBA is a legislature-created entity.

HEBERT: Yes. There is a board of directors and I have served on the board since its inception in 2005.

BAUMGARTNER: How did you get involved?

HEBERT: By appointment; of course I had been in the water business for thirty years. I live in the authority's designated area. You have to live within the geographical authority and it is divided into seven districts. I have the biggest geographical precinct because my area is the most undeveloped and I have the largest possibility of MUD districts and future MUD districts. The booming City of Fulshear is in my precinct.

BAUMGARTNER: You are just as busy as can be with that aren't you, because Fulshear has all these MUDS's coming along with all the new subdivisions?

HEBERT: Yes, all those are mine.

BAUMGARTNER: What does the NFBWA have to do when a new MUD comes to town?

HEBERT: The first thing we have to do is prepare for them what they call a ground water reduction plan that must be approved by the Subsidence District. We have to tell them that we expect to take X amount of water from the ground, or perhaps we expect to import X amount of surface water which we will obtain from the City of Houston. We have a little leeway and try to make sure that if a MUD is coming in we are planning for it. You know MUDs just don't pop up; they are in the planning stage for a long time.

BAUMGARTNER: Now you submit this report to the Subsidence District. The report is not prepared via the MUDs, it flows through you.

HEBERT: Yes. The MUD is our customer. For all the wells that are in our authority, we have to report the pump age to the Subsidence District as well as how much water we import.

BAUMGARTNER: So you are bringing in all this water from City of Houston. There must be incredible infrastructure involved getting the water out here.

HEBERT: Yes. We are in the process now of partnering. There are five entities that are involved, including West Harris County, North Harris County, City of Houston, East Harris County and we are expanding their east treatment plant. We will all share a portion of the water it produces. It is coming down from Lake Houston into this plant; a multi-billion dollar project. From that plant we are in partnership with West Harris County Water Authority which is north of the Cinco Ranch area. We are building a line about forty miles across North Harris County to a take point. We will share the water with West Harris County.

BAUMGARTNER: There you take it from there?

HEBERT: It is about forty miles and part of a 96 inch pipeline and it will have 83 inches coming in. We are tunneling under freeways. Project cost is projected to cost over two

billion dollars.

BAUMGARTNER: Is NFBWA responsible for overseeing raising the money to facilitate the piping into Fort Bend County?

HEBERT: Yes. It is huge. Billions.

BAUMGARTNER: You guys vote on the finance issues. So the financial issue is a big part of North Fort Bend Water Authority function.

HEBERT: Yes, a big part. We have to sell the bonds. We are not a taxing authority. We can't tax. Our revenue is based on use.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow, it is really sophisticated financial involvement. Who buys the bonds; this is a Wall Street function?

HEBERT: Yes. Our bond person has been up in New York this past week just getting ready to sell our bonds. We have a meeting once a month that is just a normal meeting and we meet at the Authority office at the Willow Fork Country Club office and then we have the committee meetings. I usual make two of those a month.

BAUMGARTNER: What do the committees do?

HEBERT: We have a design committee that I rarely go to, which is literally the engineering part of it. I am on the finance committee and I am on the conservation committee. Conservation is a huge part of what we do; we spend a lot of money every year trying to educate people about water conservation.

BAUMGARTNER: You also have an education agenda and work with the schools, don't you?

HEBERT: We are trying hard to get into the schools. They are trying to work us into the curriculum. We created a large tool box a few years ago and the MUDs can join; I think we are up to nine different programs they can choose to participate in, from easy ones to hard ones. They get so many points for each one they participate in and we give them rebates if they make it. I think we have done about \$400,000 in rebates to the MUDS. So it will help them if they get involved in participation.

BAUMGARTNER: I am not going to get into Bob's activities and his involvement with the complex water issues, but is there anybody in the Houston area more knowledgeable than or as knowledgeable as Bob?

HEBERT: He would probably be up there in the top five.

BAUMGARTNER: Some years ago, Bob may not remember this; he assisted me in learning about water problems facing the community. I was about to be placed on the Fort Bend Subsidence District Board, and had served on the Richmond/Rosenberg Inter Local Government Corp. in connection with building a water plant but my knowledge was very limited. I called Bob whom I really didn't know and asked if he could explain to me some things about the water business. He was very gracious and took the time to meet with me at the courthouse with his secretary. It was very helpful and most of it was new to me, but it gave me a good introduction into how complex the water issues are.

HEBERT: I think most of the people in MUDs don't understand what our fee is for and what our role is in bringing in surface water. We charge the MUDS a fee for providing them with surface water, which has to be treated different than ground water. Our mission is to reduce ground water extracted from wells, and the mission is mandated by the state.

BAUMGARTNER: Of course it is not just the northern Fort Bend County municipalities that have the mandate. Richmond constructed a twenty million dollar water plant from the Brazos River and Rosenberg is getting their surface water from the Brazos out of Brazoria County and pumping it to Rosenberg.

HEBERT: Have they completed that?

BAUMGARTNER: Yes it is on line. You know what is amazing is there has been almost no negative feedback from the community. They were all worried that the river water was going to taste different but to date there's been little response. No news is good news.

FORT BEND COUNTY MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

Pat, when did you get involved with the Fort Bend County Museum?

HEBERT: Bob had been on the Board before he became County Judge, and I had been volunteering before that helping with the Moore House tours that we offered to the public.

BAUMGARTNER: With the Docents?

HEBERT: I was a Docent and was involved in that for quite a few years. They were a great bunch of ladies and I enjoyed it.

BAUMGARTNER: Are any of them still around?

HEBERT: I hear from Joyce Lolley, asking me to come to the Docent meeting on Saturday.

She calls me every month. I was part of the Candlelight Tour for years and years. I would help decorate and in fact I did the Christmas tree that is in the hallway, for the Candlelight Tour for five or six years.

BAUMGARTNER: That got a big turnout.

HEBERT: It did and I think it is still very successful. I got involved with the board probably when Bob was elected County Judge; I think it was a nine year term.

BAUMGARTNER: What did the board do and what was the function of the Fort Bend County Museum Association.

HEBERT: What I remember especially is looking for money. Michael Moore had been museum director for over twenty years. During that time frame he moved on to other things, you remember, and we asked Candy Jones to step in as the executive director which was a big step for her.

BAUMGARTNER: She was very excited.

HEBERT: She was very excited about the opportunity to do that and I think once everything settled down I think she did a good job and she was very passionate about it.

BAUMGARTNER: I do remember that we had to spend so much time on fund raising that to me it distracted from the function of the museum.

HEBERT: I think that is the case with anything like that nowadays. As these non-profits have grown over the years, there are so many of them competing for the same funds. This is just a guess but there are probably five hundred people in the county who are consistent donors, and over the years there are now over one hundred events. It is pretty much the same group that attends these events who are the major donors. Now, you take the Museum's Lone Star Stomp, you will get a lot more people involved in that event and get some more consistent donors from that.

BAUMGARTNER: Why the Stomp, do you think?

HEBERT: I think it is just a fun event, just one that people have always enjoyed going to. You don't have to get dressed up, you can go western.

BAUMGARTNER: Very informal, you see people who you haven't seen for a good while.



Pat & Bob celebrating a milestone

HEBERT: It is just a fun, fun event. Last year when we went the honorees were all the previous chairmen and I had been one of those. That was a fun time and I had seen a lot of people that I hadn't seen in a long time.

BAUMGARTNER: Who was serving with you on the board when you were president?

HEBERT: Oh my gosh, you are really testing my memory. I know Roy Cordes and you, Joe Bonham. Melody Hess. Bill Zemanek...

It was challenging at times because Michael had been there for so long and things were kind of set. We were having challenges with finances. We were trying to expand, trying to enlarge programs and figure out what our relationship with the George Ranch was. How we were going to make that work. With the museum in town and the foundation and possible expansion to Decker Park... all those conversations.

BAUMGARTNER: It seems like it has always been similar issues with the big factor that the museum needs a regular stream of cash flow that they can rely on and be able to focus on other things besides fundraising that the museum is supposed to be doing. And there has always been an issue between the museum in Richmond versus the George Ranch program and what that relationship is.

HEBERT: That was a big issue in our time, but I think that has been resolved a lot more. I think there is a good relationship now.

Looking back, it was such a positive experience. One of the things that I enjoyed was demonstrating spinning for the children tours at the Moore Home. I had taken a spinning class from Barbara Neuford who is an excellent spinner and for a few years I did that.

BAUMGARTNER: How old were the school children?

HEBERT: Most of them I would say fourth or fifth grade; it was part of the history curriculum. Their favorite thing was when I explained what ginning the cotton was. In that era the mother or father of the family would have them sit and gin cotton at night, which meant pull those cotton seeds out. They had to fill their shoe with cotton that had been ginned. They would have to fill up their shoes. If they were little they had to only fill a little shoe. If they were big they had to fill a big shoe.

BAUMGARTNER: That was their chore for the night.

HEBERT: Then that gave the mother enough cotton to spin the next day. These big kiddos at the ranch would look down at their big shoes and they got a kick out of that. They would pull the seeds out.

I chaired Texian Market Days for a couple of years. The first time it was a three day event.

BAUMGARTNER: Which was one day too much?

HEBERT: One day too much [both laughing], but then we got it down to a two day event. It was fun to work on, a very popular outdoor festival that brought in visitors from all over the area including many from Houston. We brought in the different vendors and programs, and worked with staff out at the ranch so they could highlight their programs.

We also had the reenactment going on depicting different eras of Fort Bend history. It was very successful. It was a lot of work because you had all the vendors to work with, the programs and scheduling to coordinate and making sure they could do the chores and not have the reenactment at the same time that the cannon goes off.

BAUMGARTNER: What were some of the programs?

HEBERT: A popular reenactment called for literally two camps, the Northern and Southern troops, which would have their Civil War scrimmage and they would shoot the cannon. For a couple years they showed how the Native Americans lived, came and set up their Tepee's and some of their crafts. That was very popular.

Visitors got to watch roping the cows and literally go through some of the barns and the stalls where the animals lived and walk down to where you crossed over the bridge into the area where the encampment was set up. We had games set up, old fashioned games, with the hoops, so they could play the games of a long time ago. They had vendors where you could get something to eat. They were able to tour the homes.

BAUMGARTNER: My recollection was that it was very well received by foreigners, with lots of Germans and international visitors.

HEBERT: Back around 1992 the Republican National Convention was held here in Houston. I was able to host a State Delegation, I think it was Iowa or Idaho, and brought them out here. I set up a tour and got the buses for them to come out to the George Ranch. We had an outdoor meal out by the Moore Home and they got to go up in the old family tree.

BAUMGARTNER: I bet they loved it. That may have been the highlight...

HEBERT: It was. I know when I moved to Texas I thought it was all going to be horses and cowboys riding down the road. I think that was their thought process. To actually come out there and see horses and cows...

BAUMGARTNER: You mean when you came here from high school.

HEBERT: Yes, I didn't know what Texas was. They had a great time and when I look back on it there were entities like Exxon hosting elaborate State Delegations and here we are hosting one in our little group out at the George Ranch. They were doing a fancy event in the ballroom and I heard later that ours was the best. They got to see Texas. They had never seen a ballroom where everybody just stood around and mingled. They got out and saw a part of Texas. We got rave reviews.

This is what I think about when I think of Texas. We've been blessed.

BAUMGARTNER: Thank you Pat. I've enjoyed it and it's been great catching up with you.

HEBERT: It really has tested my memory (both laughing). Thank you.



Pat & Bob Hebert

End of interview