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Carol Wilcox: I'm Carol Wilcox and I'm former Mayor or just citizen of Morris fine with me, 2000 to 2009

Q: When did you first come to Morris?

Carol Wilcox: We moved to Morris in 1959 and I was always interested in government that sort of thing and I became very interested in government when we had a dangerous situation as I saw it on Columbia Avenue and so that was the reason that I got quite involved with city government at that time. I was teaching school so there was an opportunity.

Q: What was the dangerous situation?

Carol Wilcox: When we first came to town there was no sidewalk on Columbia Avenue, the high school was let's see on the end where the old elementary school is now and then when they built the new high school in '69 then students would walk back and forth on there and there was no sidewalk so I talked to one of the board members and said, you know, "We really need to do something about this." And he agreed so he went to the school board and I went to the city council and it took a long time, I think it was ten years before we finally got the sidewalk so but we do have a sidewalk there now and it's much less dangerous for everyone and it's used a lot.

Q: Announced the birth of your political career so to speak.

Carol Wilcox: That's it.

Q: Before you became a council person what kind of interaction did you have with the college?

Carol Wilcox: Very little, actually I didn't have much interaction with the college at all except that we did have a student that lived with us, her parents moved to California when she was a junior in college out here and then she stayed with us. So we did, you know, attend some of the activities out there with her but that was about the extent of it,

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I really didn't know until after I became involved in city government how the college came about being here and, you know, there's a lotta history there too.

Q: And you came in really a key time which was 1959 and that was the transformation of west central too.

Carol Wilcox: Right.

Q: Do you know we've encountered mixed opinions, there were some people that were sad about west central, there were some people that understood; they were sad but they understood and there were some people who were just genuinely glad. Where did you fall in this towards?

Carol Wilcox: Well I think we had friends that were farmers and lived on the farm and they saw it as a real difficult situation when the Ag School closed. I kind of saw it as a step in the next direction, you know, of going forward, moving forward and I know that many, many of the people in Morris who were looking to the future and could see the future, worked hard and long to get that and I think they could see the future a lot better than a lot of us could but there were both sides of that situation.

Q: I think you're talking about people like Ed LeFevre and Ed Morrison and Clayton <inaudible>.

Carol Wilcox: Yes and how many times they sat over a cup of coffee, I've heard this story anyway and talking about of course the Ag School had a much short school year and so there were six months that those buildings stood empty and as I understand it that was how some of that began that whole talking about-- and interesting isn't it that they were worried that those buildings were standing idle for six months. Now we make sure that that doesn't happen because the economy and everything is so different.

Q: That's a good point.

Carol Wilcox: Very true.

Q: So then you came to council and after some time you were elected mayor. As the

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Mayor of Morris, what are the opportunities, I mean which instances do you have to communicate with the chancellor or with the university in general?

Carol Wilcox: Well we have a wonderful partnership over the last oh I'd say 15 years, it's really gotten to be a very strong partnership and I think both of us realize that what's good for the city is good for the college and what's good for the college is good for the city, you know, it really is a partnership and that was first demonstrated probably when--well the Center for Small Towns has done a really good job of well first of all seeing where the need is and then finding a way to fill that need and so with them we have done a lot of partnering and I don't know if you're familiar with Morris is one of the finalists in an All American City and the university was well represented when we went to Atlanta to showcase our city and that was just great because it showed and even the judges there commented about how important it was for a city of our size to be working that closely with the university. So we've always in the last I'd say 15, 20 years we've had a very, very close relationship and then of course we partnered again on the Jimmy and Rosalind Carter Partnership Award and won there, we thought that was pretty wonderful, so we've had some really good experience.

Q: I'm glad you brought the Center for Small Towns because that was sort of a big development.

Carol Wilcox: It was a big development for Morris but it was also a big development for the whole area because they don't limit their help and their expertise to just Stevens County, I mean they reach out and it's been good for rural Minnesota.

Q: To someone who's not familiar with the Center for Small Towns, can you just generally describe what kind of things do they do to help rural areas?

Carol Wilcox: The Center for Small Towns helped us when needed a survey and they got the students, I mean they always have student help there, they got the class, the teachers that were, you know, interested in something like that and helped us with that survey. So they've written several surveys or they've connected us with the right people. When we were getting ready to take the issue of a school bond to a referendum they helped us with some of those things and they've helped other rural like Herman had them help with some of their needs with fewer teachers and fewer students and how they could teach and get everything that students needed into their curriculum with the number of teachers they had. So they've helped in many, many

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ways things, you know, if you tell 'em what you need, they usually can find some way to help with it.

Q: There's also been some other-- we were talking about this in more specific ways before the camera was on but I wanna revisit those, tell me about the snow plow in Morris.

Carol Wilcox: This was one of the first connections or experiences that I had with students as a council member was when some of the students from a-- I believe they were from a statistics class came to the city council and they said "We've been studying the way you plow your snow and we think we've got a better way. Well, you know, we had people that weren't so sure that we were all a little bit taken aback "How do these young kids know what they're talking about?" But our person that's in charge of the snow plow, he said he'd try it and yeah it did work. So that's the route that we used. So they've helped us in so many ways. We had an intern one time that came to City Hall and we were in the process of changing some policies and he did a lot of research on other towns and the size of ours, how they deal with a certain problem. I believe it was a rental issue actually and what they do and so, you know, the students have helped immeasurably. And there are always those little personal things that they do. My mom was at the Villa of Saint Francis when it was still the Villa many years ago and some of the students came out and spent time with the elderly people and they wrote poems and they told stories and then they also had a big friend/little friend program and low and behold my granddaughter had the same big friend as my mom had at the Villa. So, you know, and this gal was telling-- my mother told her things that I had never heard about, you know, when she was young and so she was able to relay those to Sydney my granddaughter so, you know, just so many connections and so many ways that the university has improved life for a lot of us.

Q: You were also saying that the students had a lot to do with the fact that we have rental discussions <inaudible>?

Carol Wilcox: That's right, we took that to the voters of Morris and unfortunately they didn't see a need for a rental inspection so it failed. But the students found a little quirk and found that if they had a certain number of names on a petition and brought it to City Council and it was a certain percentage of the number of people who had voted at the last election that we would have to listen to them again and they did that and we have a rental inspection. In fact we have many towns our size, especially small college towns that call Morris and say "How did you get this to work and what do you do?" and so, you

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know, they've been great for not only Morris but for other towns too, that have the same kind of problems. Students are great, you have good ideas. Morris is dead in the summer time but when the students come back everything just livens up and most of us appreciate that.

Q: And the other side of that card and I know mid southerners are among the most humble people in the world that there are definite ways that UMM has benefited like being in a town as friendly and community focused as Morris.

Carol Wilcox: Well I think that the students probably get some experiences here that they would not get in a much larger place because how many students would go to the City Council in Minneapolis tell 'em how to plow their streets. So, you know, they do get some experiences that are unique.

Q: How about the arts and culture, do you often get to go; do you often take in performance art series or concerts and choirs?

Carol Wilcox: Some, not as much as I should, I even performed in one of their plays can you believe that? Yeah that's another thing that they bring to a town of our size which just wouldn't be available in any other town and there are some people that take advantage of everything that's offered out there and there are some that have never been on campus which is unfortunate but it's reality.

Q: Did you have any children attend here?

Carol Wilcox: No my children did not, my son in law did and actually his dad was the mayor before me and I think that Marilyn Beyer said that four of his children went to UMM yeah.

Q: And I understand that because if you grow up in Morris, there's not a-- I can understand that certainly, regardless of how good the school is, you wanna branch out. If you didn't live in Morris, why would you send a child UMM?

Carol Wilcox: I think because of the experiences that they get, UMM just can't be beat, I mean as far as if they've got a good idea, somebody will listen to them and that doesn't happen in every college. There's a wonderful relationship with most of the

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citizens of Morris and with students, they're always willing to open their hearts and their homes and welcome them to Morris so I think the students certainly can get a wonderful education here because we've got great professors and I'm always amazed at how many of those professors once they retire stick around, they don't go too far from here so, you know, they must find living in Morris okay too.

Q: I need to tell you a quick story and then I'll ask you another question but Mimi _____ who was in the Women's Studies Department is from Louisiana and she said she-- this was long before she retired, she said "I knew, I remember the moment I decided I was gonna live in Morris." She was taking the local bus and it was a really snowy day, the banks were very high and there was this elderly woman on there and she had a couple of bags of groceries and they stopped in front of her house and she just looked out and she said "Oh my goodness I'll never get these bags of groceries in the house." The driver said "That's fine I'll carry 'em for you." She's told me that several times, she said "That was the moment I knew I was a Morris resident for life."

Carol Wilcox: That's wonderful, it makes me feel good when I hear that citizens do that sort of thing but I've heard it before because we do have very caring people in the community.

Q: Oh, you know, speaking of buses, I almost forgot to-- are you familiar with the bus route project between Morris and the university?

Carol Wilcox: Yeah unless things have changed, I mean I know that they have their set times that they come out and drop the students or pick them up and bring them downtown and has.

Q: Oh <inaudible> thinking about the school bus routes that making them more efficient but <inaudible>.

Carol Wilcox: Probably I don't know about that no.

Q: With your background as Mayor and council person is there anything you can say about the economic impact of the university; what can you tell us?

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Carol Wilcox: Yes the economic impact I don't believe most people realize but I know as a parent and as a grandparent that parents are going to make sure that their children have what they need and probably a little more. If there's money to be had and the kids want something you're gonna try and get it for them and we're lucky enough to be here when they're going to college and see that happening. I see students at the grocery store all the time, it just really makes you feel good when you see that they're out and about, a part of the community they don't isolate themselves, they don't bring everything back with them from home. They do come down here and I see some of them working at different businesses downtown so that's a good feeling.

<Crew Talk>

Q: Do you have anything you'd like to add in closing?

Carol Wilcox: I suppose I'll think of something when I get home. I did think of something when we were talking, what was it though? It's gone, I guess I lost it. But yeah I went down one time when the regions were thinking of cutting a lot of the budget here and Sam Shuman was the chancellor at the time and Sam asked if I'd go down and meet with the regions and so I did and what I told them was, you know, "In rural Minnesota Steven's County, if go to any of these main streets after ten o'clock they're folded up" and I said "Yeah we have our share of things that fold down at ten o'clock but we have those students that keep us going and keep us alive and we can be very, very grateful for what we have. It used to be enough to be a county seat, that's not the case anymore, you have to have something more to offer and for us it happens to be the university. They brought economic downtown, improved economics but they also brought jobs that offered a whole lot better benefits than anything that was around here before so I think we have gained much more from the university than the university has from us.

Q: I've heard a lot of people talk, there's this air culture change, the family farms went away, where was the income gonna come from?

Carol Wilcox: Exactly, exactly, they're just too huge those farms, you know, well that's pretty obvious on school bus routes. I was talking to a man who'd driven a bus for many, many years and he said, you know, "I used to have six families to pick up and my bus was full." Well that doesn't happen, we don't have families of that size anymore,

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we have big conglomerates that are buying up the land and the whole scene is completely different than it was 25 years ago. So if we don't change then we get stuck in that same rut and that's what happens so often if you don't have and that's one of the best things that the university brings to Morris, they just keep us moving and keep us on our toes. A few years back the city of Morris was a finalist in the All American City Competition and we looked at the projects that we had done with the university and one of the most popular ones was called "TREC" I believe, it was one the kids tutored the elementary children and it was a big help to the kids, to the parents. What we found was that parents had more patience with their kids when they got home because the students had helped them get their homework done and, you know, it's one of those mushroom things that you don't realize, all of the benefits that are gonna come from something like that. But that was just one example and we had a student who had worked with the program come with us to Atlanta for the competition and my granddaughter went and another young girl, so we had two young people that went along and they told about this program at school and it made such an impression on the judges. We just had Sam Shuman went along to Atlanta to tell about the connection between the city and actually we had more to talk about the economic side of it than he did because I don't think that we help him-- the university a whole lot with the economic side but the students certainly bring a great deal to the city. So we had all kinds of-- it was a really good experience having both students and faculty that came with us for that.

Q: Well tell me a little bit more about the Carter Award, what was the motivation to apply for that and then on what basis were we applying?

Carol Wilcox: Actually quite a while before that the city and the university together, Center for Small Towns had actually the Center for Small Towns had instigated an application to HUDD for a partnership between a community, a small town community and the university campus compound and we wrote-- we had a dream list we made. Anyway we found out that we got the grant and it was over four or five years that we had money coming in that we could do some of these dream list things and one of them was establishing a Habitat for Humanity program. We did that, we've got three houses that we've built and another one that's going to be built this next summer. There's a chapter on campus that help us so the partnerships don't end at the end when the money runs out from the grant, we still have things that are happening because of that grant and it was the Center for Small Towns that submitted the grant with the help of the city and then that was the basis for our entering the Rosalind and Jimmy Carter Partnership Award because we really did accomplish a lot of things with that, the money that was sent from HUDD but it benefitted the city and it benefitted the university and

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students particularly. That's when we ended up with our rental inspection too so there were many ideas that came out of that and because of our working together, the campus and the city we were able to see big accomplishments.

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