

Lynn, Edward - CBPL 25th Anniversary Oral History 2023-05-12

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: [00:00:00] Okay, so we are here with an oral histories interview recording for our 25th anniversary of the library building. My name is Antonia Krupicka -Smith. That's spelled a n t o n i a k r u p i c k a hyphen s m i t h and I'm the library director here right now at the library. The date today is May 12th 2023 and it's 3 p. m. at 400 Willow Avenue, the location of the Council Bluffs Public Library. And we are in the boardroom and today I'm going to be talking a little bit with Ed Lynn. Ed, would you introduce yourself?

Edward Lynn: Yeah, good afternoon. My name is Edward Lynn, L Y N N.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: We appreciate the spelling. And, um, do I have permission to record this interview for our archives, Ed?

Edward Lynn: Certainly.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: I appreciate that. And so let's get you started. Um, right now, what would you say your role is in the [00:01:00] community right now, Ed?

Edward Lynn: Well, I'm retired. I was, uh, chief administrative officer and president of Jennie Edmundson Hospital from 1966 until 1996, and been retired now for over 20 years.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Are you from Council Bluffs?

Edward Lynn: No, originally grew up in the Chicago area, went to University of Illinois at Champaign, then uh, military, then University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, stayed and worked there until I came to Council Bluffs.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Okay, that's great. So um, what was your role in the community 25 years ago?

Edward Lynn: I'm not sure how to answer that question. You always wear multi, multi hats. See, 25 years ago was 19...

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: 98.

Edward Lynn: 1998. Well, I was retired [00:02:00] and I had been retired then since 1996. I was, during that time, involved with some multi projects, I think. Library certainly was one of my activities. I was, uh, Chairman of the Library Board back in the, in the 90s when we were in the Carnegie Library.

And I then became, uh, a member of the, uh, Library Foundation as it was written. I think I was probably a, one of the original members, certainly one of the early members of, of the foundation. And at that time I was, uh, I think I was the fund, the fund chairman raising the funds for the new library. But by the time the new [00:03:00] library was completed, I was chairman of the foundation board.

There's a number of areas I was active in the community, but really probably too many to go over.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: But that's how you're connected here to our oral histories conversation around the library.

Edward Lynn: I've had a long connection and love for libraries. I can remember as a young child in Maywood, Illinois, competing to see who could read the most books checked out from the library.

Then I can remember how impressed I was when I attended the University of Illinois, which was one of the finest, at least at that time, libraries in the country. And, uh, really learned to appreciate that library and used it a lot. Then when I was in Minnesota, the head of the Minneapolis library system, Bob Roth(?), was a... friend of mine. So I've had a long connection, interest in libraries. Like most people who like interest in the [00:04:00] libraries, it's because we like to read.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Yeah.

Edward Lynn: Pretty basic.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: So you mentioned that you, um, 25 years ago, you were associated with the library on the board.

Edward Lynn: Of the library.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: And then on the foundation.

Edward Lynn: Yes, but I was on the foundation at the time the library was completed. My duty, my service as president of the library board was prior to that time.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Prior to that time, but that was when maybe the idea was hatched that we should go forward.

Edward Lynn: Well, there was certainly talk of it. I think that the real impetus to get a new library came from the library, from the foundation. I think the need for a new library was a basic, one of the basic reasons for the found... founding of the foundation to begin with.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm-hmm.

Edward Lynn: And, uh, there were some who did not see the need of a new library and as contrasted to those in the [00:05:00] library foundation. And we felt most of the people of the community saw the need for a new library Council Bluffs had for many years, library services, which...

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: mm-hmm.

Edward Lynn: I think were... need to be proud of, but everything ages, and everything needs to get a little better. And of course, everybody knows the role Mr. Carnegie played in libraries throughout the country, and certainly was instrumental in moving Council Bluffs from a small, back of the store kind of situation to a real library and a fine library.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: So I want to know a little bit more about the fundraising efforts and the work that went into raising the money, which is a little bit different than the construction of a building.

Edward Lynn: Well, I think that one of the things that made this different was the [00:06:00] funding of the library, contrary to most communities where tax funds were really the driving force to create the new library. This library was being suggested and pushed forward and financed by private sources and private, private money. With some help from the city. The city certainly did not oppose the library in any means.

It was going to be their library of course. And, uh, but it was not tax money that really ended a building, it was directly funds from donors and other large, well, I'm trying to remember, yeah, and foundations, of course, were significant. Very significant.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Was that easy?

Edward Lynn: Well, when you look back, always things look a little easier than they were at the time.

And, [00:07:00] uh, I can remember, of course, early in the game, there had been some efforts in the community. There had been, if I remember correctly, a proposed bond issue or something, and which failed. And I think that's really what was the emphasis, the incentive to create the foundation, to create a force that would make it happen.

And I can remember there had been early in the game sketches of what the library could be looking like, and what could be the dream. And I think one of the... things that was said by someone that helped drive us forward, was when looking at a very nice sketch, comment was made, that's too good for Council Bluffs.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Oh, wow.

Edward Lynn: And, uh, that of course drove us forward, because we didn't visualize doing anything that we wouldn't... community wouldn't be proud of, and stay proud of. [00:08:00]

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Yeah. And do it the right way, as well.

Edward Lynn: Well, that was interesting. The architect was Leo Daly. And in working with the architect from there, he later made the comment, that was one of his first commissions, where he was able to build what he wanted to see built.

In other words, we weren't moving him, and cutting him back from his ideas, etc. And, uh, he was proud, and I'm sure you've probably seen that the, design received recognition and some, and some awards. I can remember he and I and the library director, I think we spoke at the American Library Association meeting in Kansas City.

I also made a presentation to the Iowa... presentation and it was the different funding base I think that really [00:09:00] grabbed that attention plus the quality of the library that it produced.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: With your fundraising conversations, is there any one conversation or one turning point that you remember where it went from maybe an idea to this is really happening?

Edward Lynn: No, it really was happening within the foundation. You know, support was developed and there were people involved in the foundation who were capable of sharing support from various places. When I say assuring, they would not be able to commit the organization they might be with, but uh, assured the foundation they would do what they could to help make this happen, and did.

Certainly the, uh, Iowa West Foundation was a very integral part of the funding base. Lied Foundation became an important part of that base. That was a little more difficult one to get than the Iowa West Foundation. During the, [00:10:00] I can't remember if it was while I was chairman of the foundation board or while I was involved in the fundraising, but, uh, I, it was probably 1997, so it was probably fundraising. Anyway, I was set back a bit because I had a three week stay in the hospital with septicemia.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Oh.

Edward Lynn: Which kills about 80% of the people, so...

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: yeah.

Edward Lynn: Made period a little more difficult.

But I think there was very strong newspaper support. The Nonpareil was very good. They went on to the project very quickly and were very supportive in the media. And so that added to the community.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm hmm. So, do you have any memory associated with the actual opening of the building? So, not necessarily all the work ahead of time, but when those doors went open, do you have, were you [00:11:00] here? Do you remember what it was like to see people coming in and using the library or any of the comments?

Edward Lynn: Well, I think the basic comment was, how beautiful, how nice. I think there were, the first event was a so called tapping off ceremony when they erected the steel. And there was some support at that time. And of course it also indicated that the fundraising had been successful.

I don't remember the exact number, but it was like 13 million or something. In that ballpark. And if I remember correctly the Lied Foundation was probably around 2 million. And I don't remember what the Iowa West number ran, finally was, but significant.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Yeah.

Edward Lynn: Certainly.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: It was a match with whatever the foundation had given, so, you know, up there multi million for sure.

Edward Lynn: But, uh, approved, built and paid for and enjoyed ever since.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Yes. Yes. For sure. Um, is there [00:12:00] anything that you want to share about your memory of using the library or anything since now that the building's been open for 25 years?

Edward Lynn: It's a comfortable library. It really is easy to use. And of course those of us that think back to the card catalogs of the drawers and drawers and drawers of cards to find a book or a subject and the time it took to research. What you might be working on is almost medieval compared to where you can use a library today and the electronics and the information systems. The ability to, well, the convenience of using a library where you can practically tap every service of the library from your home. Not everything but a... a great deal of it.

The foundation has always felt right from the beginning, and I think feels that way today, [00:13:00] that the library is never finished. That the library was as good as we could make possible at the time it was opened. But if the library board and the city and the library foundation had chosen at that point to say, well, this job is done, now we can forget about that, uh, we would not be what we are today.

We've... all of the entities involved realize it's an ongoing thing. And each change of director, I think you're probably the third, fourth?

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: I think I'm the fourth since Jim.

Edward Lynn: Since, well, since Mildred Smock, of course.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Yes, yes.

Edward Lynn: And had Jim and had...

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Barbara.

Edward Lynn: Barbara. Yep, you're the fourth.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Yep, then Kathy.

Edward Lynn: And each director has been a fine person with great ideas. And each director that's, has had newer ideas as they [00:14:00] succeeded. And I'm sure someday someone will succeed you and have newer ideas. And, but that's the way it's intended to be. And that's what keeps us going. It's, if you, if you don't stay up to date and realize what's going on in a community, I think you very quickly think you know and don't.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm hmm. Yep. It's that when you stop trying. You know or stop thinking you need to try that's when you're done.

Edward Lynn: No, you're never done You're only, you're only done with a project.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm hmm.

Edward Lynn: That gives you the opportunity to move to the next project.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Mm hmm

Edward Lynn: Certainly coming from a hospital background. Definitely true there. Uh, you know you're dealing with equipment that you may spend \$100, 000 on today and six months from now it's obsolete with a

new development. Those have been tough decisions. I think it's a lot easier to decide whether to buy a book than to...

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: This is [00:15:00] true. Um, is there any other memories you want to share about the making of this library and your involvement in that?

Edward Lynn: Well, I was trying to think... there are many little bumps in the road as you go. I think one of the early things you don't give much thought to is what it took to acquire this piece of land to build the library on. Because this was downtown business area filled with businesses and there were not empty lots.

I think there might have been one, if I remember correctly, where a gas station once had been. Then much of that had to be acquired, a business at a time, a lot at a time, negotiations, and of course a lot of money was spent during that period of time. But it was not easy to acquire the site. Thank you. Uh, I can remember being well down in the road, but oh [00:16:00] boy, we finally have got the site.

When somebody said, well, didn't there used to be a gas station on that? So then the question is raised, is there any pollution problem we have to worry about? So then there had to be a lot of, a lot of soil testing. And I don't know if it still exists today, but if I remember correctly, early in the approval, there was a well put down the, so the testing could be done occasionally to see if there was any pollution that developed.

I never have heard of any problems. I assume there hasn't been. But it was not a big problem, but it's just another lump in the road. And of course, like many projects, you get down where you need one more piece of land.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Just one more, and then it will happen. Just one more star to align, and then it will happen. Yeah.

Edward Lynn: That was an, it was an interesting period of time. As I remember, I, I moved on from the library to doing the fundraising and then [00:17:00] the, uh, I was chairman of the board of the senior center when it was, was developed. So I went from the library to the senior center to raising the funds for a new church.

That's what I did for the next first years of my retirement.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Just raise money for community good.

Edward Lynn: It was interesting, there was several small library boards out in the area that asked me to come speak to them. With basically the question, how do we raise money in our community like you raised in yours? Well, sometimes they don't have that large of a donor in many of these communities to kick it off properly but it can be done.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: How is it done? Give us the secret.

Edward Lynn: Well, there is, there is no one secret. It's a lot of hard work, and it's, it's, it's knowing the community and knowing, knowing the people because I've done fundraisers, as you can imagine, in the hospital industry, I've done fundraising there for many years, indirectly, and [00:18:00] it's always been amazed to me that some of the really big money and charitable givers, can often come from people you don't think have any money.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: It's about the people and the impact.

Edward Lynn: You never know. And everyone has a love someplace. Or someone they love that they would like to recognize. And sometimes the smallest little thing that can trigger the interest of a person that can be a significant donor. And...

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: And that's what the library's done. It's been significant for this community for sure.

Edward Lynn: Well, my oldest daughter probably uses the library three or four times a week. She lives in Ames, Iowa.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Oh, yeah.

Edward Lynn: Loves books, and the material I receive here from our library, I forward to [00:19:00] her.

She grew up in a home where reading was important, and I grew up in a home with a mother that read to me all the time and I've always felt that raising children, reading your children's one of the most significant things you can do, but you're a pro. You know more about that than I do.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: But it's good to hear that, that there are more that feel that way. Because that is a lot of the work that we try to do here at the library.

Edward Lynn: Well, I think your program with the distribution of books to ...what's the ages you're distributing them to now?

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Zero to five.

Edward Lynn: Zero to five. Well, you're planting a lot of seeds.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Yeah, with the support of the foundation for sure.

Edward Lynn: Absolutely.

Antonia Krupicka-Smith: Well, thank you so much for chatting with me today and letting us know about your experience with bringing this building to the community and the services of the library. We appreciate it.

Edward Lynn: You're welcome.