

Oral History Interview with Mayor Kelvyn Cullimore, Jr.

[Editor's Note: Kelvyn Cullimore, Jr. served as Mayor of the City of Cottonwood Heights. Elected in November, 2004 and serving until his retirement from office in January, 2018. He was also a prominent figure in the city's incorporation drive of 2003-2004.]

Ken Verdoia: This oral history interview is being conducted in the City Council Chambers of the Cottonwood Heights City Hall, in Cottonwood Heights, Utah, on December 7, 2021. Conducting the interview for the Cottonwood Heights Historic Committee is committee member Ken Verdoia.

Ken: Mayor, and I will refer to you as mayor during this interview.

Kelvyn Cullimore, Jr.: Thank you!

Ken: Let's begin with the basics of Kelvyn Cullimore, Jr. Tell us about your youth, where you were born, raised, leading up to how you came to know Cottonwood Heights in a special way.

Kelvyn: Okay. I'm happy to do that. I was born in Provo, Utah, as my parents were attending Brigham Young University. But, I grew up in Oklahoma. So, I'm not a native of Utah. I attended elementary school in Oklahoma City. And then we moved to a little town in northeastern Oklahoma called Miama, Oklahoma. And, I lived there for my junior high and high school years, until I came out to BYU to go to college. So that upbringing was very informative to what I became, because growing up in a small town in Oklahoma, there were lots of opportunities to be involved in many things—not all of them good, but mostly! I married a girl who grew up in Cottonwood Heights. We settled here in 1980. So, we have lived in the same home since May 1980, when I graduated from Brigham Young University and have been a constituent or proponent of Cottonwood Heights ever since.

Ken: Explain to us a little bit of your transition from your undergraduate years at Brigham Young University, into your professional career, because I know your professional career was a signature factor in your community engagement eventually.

Kelvyn: In fact, it was. My father was an entrepreneur. He grew up in Oklahoma as well. My grandfather had a home-furnishing store there. It was a very large

one—kind of like the RC Willey of Oklahoma. But my father did not enjoy being in that business, so he became an entrepreneur, got involved in many things, and by the time I graduated from Brigham Young University, he had been involved in several different businesses. And so, I got involved with him, by choice, and by invitation, and we owned a company named Dunford Bakery, which is a well-known brand here, and Salt Lake Donut Company, and several other companies.

We became aware of a company named Dynatronics, back in a little town in Kansas, that was for sale. We went back and looked at it, bought the company and moved it out to Utah. We operated it in back of the bakery. It had a medical device, a laser device that we were marketing. Unfortunately, we did not know that you had to have an FDA Approval to do that. So, the FDA showed up at our door one day, and padlocked the door! (Chuckle)

That caused us to take the company public. We raised enough money to do clinical trials, and I was involved with that company, which ultimately, in 1993, we located here in Cottonwood Heights, down on Park Center Drive, across from Target and Home Depot. I was the CEO of that business from 1992 until 2018. And so, that medical device business grew, and it was quite successful, all because my father had great vision and I learned a lot at his knee, on how to operate a business properly, and we were thrilled to have it here in Cottonwood Heights.

Ken: I had my first contact with you when I was sitting on the Cottonwood Heights Community Council, and you were trying to sift through all that went into locating a business.

Kelvyn: In fact, that was quite an interesting process. It was my first exposure to working within a municipal environment. And, as we looked at the property there, we were very interested. And, it turns out that the developer of the property just to the west of us, that at the time was a gravel pit, had just walked away from the table, as they wanted to have somebody else in there and we happened to come along at the right time and bought the property, and we were able to get it properly zoned to do what we wanted to do. And then, immediately thereafter, the developer who we bought the land from after he had walked away from the table, decided he didn't want anybody else there, so he came back and bought all the land around us and then went into the Community Council to get it re-zoned into a commercial area. We had been told that it was all going to be a Research and Development Park. So, we thought we were in a good position to be part of that Research and Development Park. So then I went and tried to fight

the re-zoning—my first exposure to how to work within a municipal environment, and met several people—yourself, Gordon Thomas, a few other people that were involved with the city. Finally, the developer came over to me and said, “Look Kelvyn, if you’re that unhappy, I’ll buy your property. You get an appraisal and I’ll pay you whatever the appraisal says and you can move someplace where you will be happier. I said, “Okay, call my bluff. We like being right where we are.” So, we didn’t sell, and he developed around us, and now—there is this medical device building in the middle of all this retail, and people wonder, “How did it get there? Why is it there?” Well, we were there *first!* (chuckle).

Ken: I imagine there were endless frustrations with trying to sort out “Who do I talk to?” “Where do I go?” “Where does the *buck* stop in this process?” Did that inform and grace your interest in getting involved in local decision making?

Kelvyn: In part, yes. We fortunately didn’t have too many barriers to cross. But, just that process, and the cumbersome nature of the process, certainly did inform my interest. That is one of the things that I reflected on, once I got involved with municipal government.

Ken: First you served on the Cottonwood Heights Community Council, did you not?

Kelvyn: I did not.

Ken: You did not? Well, you were involved with the discussions, the notion of incorporating this unincorporated area into what would eventually become the city.

Kelvyn: Well, at the time, Gordon Nickle, who was the chair of the Community Council at the time, had organized several of the community council members, and others, to consider incorporation. There were several reasons for that, that I can articulate in a minute. He came to me, because our business was one of the prominent businesses at the time in the community, to present the idea and say “What would you think about this?” I said, “I think it’s absolutely the right thing to do. And so, they invited me to become part of the committee to incorporate the city and that was very early on in the process (2003, I believe), and so we got involved, started working through it, and ultimately, all the meetings for incorporation were held at our offices at Dynatronics, and we did a lot of the resources for the incorporation from there, we got people involved and utilized as many of the community resources as we could to achieve that.

And, of course, the reasoning at the time, had become very apparent, we were part of an unincorporated county, so our representatives were the County Council, and the County Council had no tie to Cottonwood Heights. So, when there were zoning or land-use decisions of any kind, they were making decisions that were best for the broader county, not what was best for Cottonwood Heights. Also, there had been two such incidents that had happened, and really made the Community Council unhappy, because they had gone contrary to the recommendations of the Community Council.

At the same time, the legislature had just (probably five or six years earlier), recognized the inequity of what was happening in the county, which is, Salt Lake County, was the only county in the state that actually provided municipal services. What they were doing, is they were co-mingling the tax dollars. They were taking tax dollars from people who lived in *incorporated cities* in the county and utilizing them for providing municipal services to the *unincorporated* county. So, there was a time when you wanted to be in the unincorporated county, because all your costs were being subsidized by everybody who lived in the incorporated cities. So, if you lived in a city like Sandy, you were paying taxes to Sandy City for your municipal services, AND to the county. The County was using some of those dollars to provide municipal services to the unincorporated areas. The Legislature changed that and required that the County start assessing the municipal service tax, on the unincorporated area to pay for the services they were receiving. The minute that happened, the advantage of being in the county went away immediately, and taxes started going up dramatically. So, the increase in taxes, the lack of representation, the decision-making on the part of the County Council, all led to a level of dissatisfaction that might have led to incorporation.

Ken: Did you ever have any doubts about being able to sell the concept of incorporation to the people who called the area home?

Kelvyn: Some, because there were people who still believed in the old mantra that living in the unincorporated county was the best and that is what the taxes were going to. And that was true for decades, but it was no longer true, so it required educating people on the realities of what was happening. And, most people, once they understood the story, then they were able to buy into the concept.

Ken: You were a clear voice for why incorporation was so important. When did that role start to transition into, perhaps being the Chief Executive for a city?

Kelvyn: That's an interesting story, because the Incorporation Committee, and there were probably a dozen people on the Incorporation Committee, and probably six or seven that were really doing the "heavy lifting." Once we decided we were ready to move forward, had the feasibility study done, and it looked like the incorporation, literally, could be accomplished, we created a Power Point presentation, and I was appointed the spokesperson, and we went out and started holding community meetings and I was the one who was addressing the groups and answering the questions. And then we had others from the committee who would participate. We had an agreement, amongst all the committee members, that nobody would talk about what their plans were once incorporation happened, until *after* it happened, so that there was no jockeying for position or prominence or anything like that. That said, obviously, I had an advantage because I was the spokesperson for the Incorporation Committee, and I was able to articulate a lot of the concepts, and I learned a lot of the concepts in that process. And so, once we had the vote, in 2004, we had the vote in May of 2004. So, we had been doing presentations from late 2003 up to the vote. The vote came out overwhelmingly, it was 85% of those who voted, voted in favor of incorporation—I've never heard of that! It just goes to show how ready our community was for a change.

Once that was done, then they had a 30-day period when people decided if they were going to run for office, they would have to file, and ballots were being printed. I was approached by the former mayor of Holladay, Liane Stillman, who had helped us with the incorporation, and she said, "You need to be the next mayor." I said, I can't be the mayor, I'm the owner of a city public-traded company. [Stillman indicated] "It is a part-time mayor, and you can do it in your spare time." Some of the other part-time mayors said "No problem, I'm sure you can do it." And I said Okay, I'd really like to be involved. It's kind of like we gave birth to the baby and now we'd like to help raise that baby. And so, I filed, and I'd been in about a year when Mayor [Tom] Dolan, from Sandy, came up to me and said, "Have you figured out the great lie?" I said "What's the great lie?" He said, "There's no such thing as a *part-time Mayor!*" He said, "I make a six-figure salary, and do a 24/7 job. You have a full-time job and fit in your mayoral duties in-between personal time and business. Your citizens don't look at you any differently than mine look at me. They don't look at you and say: 'He's only a parttime mayor.' And so, your responsibilities are no more or less than mine."

Ken: You become the profile. You become the “go-to person” for an entire community.

Kelvyn: It helps when you have a love for the community and your goal is to make the community better, and the best place it can possibly be. That was always my motivation. My motivation was to try and make Cottonwood Heights the city everybody wanted to live in. [External noise.] I recognized that leadership requires some sacrifice, and letting other people have a voice in what we are trying to accomplish. And so, I just went out and tried to create the vision, tried to say: “Here’s what I think we can do.” And “Here’s how we can make it happen.”

It required a lot of work. I had to learn a whole new financial world. I had to learn a whole new operations world. People would say, “Oh, it’s great to have a businessman running government.” And I’d say, “Yeah, not so much, because they are different worlds, and it takes *forever* to get things done in government! That’s just the nature of government.” So, I really felt like it was a great opportunity to give back to the community that I loved so much and to get out there. It never really felt like a burden to me, it always felt like I was making a difference in helping our community become something that everybody believed in. It already was, we just had to really make it happen and I felt very fortunate to be in the lead on that.

Ken: People talk with envy about the *blank slate*. That you’re not imprisoned by what went before. The slate is *clean*, but one of the first things you have to do is draw the boundaries of the City. Do you remember just the simple mechanics to say, “How do we define this City of Cottonwood Heights?”

Kelvyn: It wasn’t that hard because we were trying to capture everything between Incorporated Holladay and Incorporated Sandy. Other boundaries included Midvale and Murray. We were trying to take the entire pocket of unincorporated that lay between those city boundaries. Unfortunately, the county and the state law, at the time, dictated how much we could take. And, we could not take *more* than was the equivalent of 105% of the cost of running the city. A feasibility study was done. The tax revenue that would be generated by that geographic area, could not exceed more than 105% of what it was projected to be the cost to run the city. As a result, we had to *lop off* Willow Creek. Willow Creek was originally part of the plan. They were originally going to be in Cottonwood Heights. But in order to meet state statute, and we were too rich, we were at 111%. In order to meet State Statute, everything north of Creek Road and

below the Bluff, we were able to get it down to 105% and became Cottonwood Heights, and everything south of Creek Road stayed as part of Sandy.

Ken: That is just one of the *endless list* of decisions that have to be made with a new city. Law enforcement, fire protection, emergency services of every order, roads, on and on and on. Law Enforcement, some communities contract out, Cottonwood Heights did not, they said “No, we want our own police force.”

Kelvyn: Well, originally we did contract. When we started the city we knew that we needed time to get our Act Together. And, to do that, so there was no interruption in services, we essentially contracted with the County for most of our services, so the services they had been providing, they continued to provide, but instead of our citizens paying a tax to the County for that, we entered into a Contract for a fixed amount, to receive those services. And so, right off the bat, the County provided most of those. The only thing we did for ourselves initially, was our own Planning Commission, and then our own Land Use Decisions and Engineering. Everything else, we contracted out. But very quickly, over a period of time, there were things we recognized we needed to change. One of the first ones was Animal Control. The County was charging us way too much money for Animal Control. We figured out how to do it on our own, hired the people, and fully arranged for it and it was a great move.

Then, the next thing was our Police Department. We had contracted with the County for the first four years. We found we had some very significant differences about how Police Services should be provided. We were unhappy with the fact that there were rarely police officers in our City. The County Sheriff at the time, said “If you need 400 officers, I will send 400 officers, but if you only need 2, I’m only going to put 2 in there. And we realized we had no control over that and one of the most important services the city provides for its citizens is public safety. And we recognized that these officers answered to the person who paid their paychecks, which was the County Sheriff. So, we made the decision to self-provide. It was an ugly process because the Sheriff was not happy. [Editor’s Note: Jim Winder served as Salt Lake County Sheriff 2006-2017] They literally campaigned through the City telling people that we couldn’t handle it, a small police department for our city, absolutely would not work. Then, to our great delight, in 2009 we proved that not only does it work, it works much better than the County! The service our citizens have received from our law enforcement has been significantly better. Crime rates have been down. We have the highest

crime resolution rates of any police department in the county, even in the state! We focused on priorities for Cottonwood Heights. We said we wanted impaired drivers off the road, we don't want to write a bunch of speeding tickets. The year before we started our police department, the County wrote 20 DUI's. The first year we were in with our own Police Department, we wrote 250 DUI's. It's not that there were more impaired drivers on the road, it was just a matter of "having a presence and having focus." I had many citizens who said "I see our police everywhere." That was true, we had good coverage and for less than the cost of what the County was charging us, we provided a much higher level of service. That was very important.

Then of course, we had our fun with a Public Works Department.

Ken: I was just going to ask you about that. Share that with me.

Kelvyn: Well, we had success in converting from contractor to self-providing. We had one really bad winter when the county "dinged" us significantly on snow removal, and we said: "We just can't tolerate this. We're at their mercy. They don't do that great of a job, and we have to pay extra. And, so we started researching it and we found a company that was doing snow removal for cities in Colorado. After checking out the work they were doing, we made the decision to privatize our snow removal and start our own Public Works Department, and it was an absolute disaster. I can remember the first snowstorm, when that hit, and it was one of those early snowstorms where a lot of snow came, the snow underneath melted, then froze, and became icy. These people, who said they could do the snow removal, absolutely underestimated what it would take, and we had just a horrible situation in the city, where every road was snow packed and icy. And, instead of it warming up, it stayed below freezing for three days, and our roads were just in horrible shape. Of course, who's responsible? ME! I mean, I was the mayor, we made that decision, so we owned it, we apologized, we tried to make it better. Ultimately, we brought it all in-house, fired that company, and provided our own snow removal—which has worked very well, and very affordable for the citizens ever since. Not everything we did worked out well, and that was *one of those things!* You can't remember certain things about your public service. To this day, people still make jokes about that snow removal in Cottonwood Heights! (Laughter)

Ken: There's sometimes an indelicate balance in the residential sense of community. And yet, a constant sense of moving forward, progress, developing,

people wanting to see new developments, or new opportunities. How did Kelvyn Cullimore try to address that sense of “Let’s hold on to what we have, but let’s move forward to the future?”

Kelvyn: That is, and you called it, it is a delicate balance. Ah, we felt like it was very important to have that balance so that the taxes, on the residential properties, didn’t continue to go up, but were offset by taxes on commercial properties. You had to have them in balance. At the same time, people didn’t want to, necessarily, have lots and lots of huge buildings and things of that nature. And so, there were some challenging times. We had one time when a developer was going to put three large buildings on the east side of Wasatch Boulevard. We thought, that just doesn’t fit with our community. Even though we want commercial, that’s not where we want it. So, we made arrangements to buy the property from the developer and turned it into a park. That’s not usual. By the same token, we felt that the redevelopment of the Canyon Racket Club, was *really important*, to help, not only with development, but also, in providing the kind of parking for the canyons that we needed. And so, we worked out the development there, as well. People weren’t very happy with that—some were, some weren’t.

The same thing with the Tavaci development up on the bluff [above Wasatch Boulevard]. That was very controversial, and we weren’t supporting it, but you have to go through a process. The developer was making it sound like we were going to approve it, citizens were up-in-arms. So, the way I approached it was, I recognized that there were private property rights that needed to be respected, there were laws that needed to be respected. And, as a result, when people came in, we needed to make our decisions, not based just on personal preference, but on principle. And, we had to make findings in the law that either supported or denied the request in front of us. And so, we worked very hard to make sure that everything we did was in a framework that was legal within the law, and respectful of people’s private property rights. Sometimes that meant, I can remember a neighborhood out by me, there was a big building going up in the Cottonwood Corporate Center on a lot that had been vacant for 30 years. The neighbors were furious! They said it shouldn’t be allowed. But the underlying entitlements said that they could do it. And there was nothing we could do to stop it, except be arbitrary and I refused to be arbitrary. I said *No*, we’re going to abide by the principles if they are legally entitled, they can proceed, and we’ll support it. The neighbors didn’t like that, and they filed suit against the city, they tried to stop the project, they lost, and they ended up having to pay attorney fees

for the development. One of the things I tried to do in all those situations was, I found that if people were informed, they could make better decisions. So, we made an extra effort to make sure that people knew what was happening and to be as transparent as we possibly could on all those kinds of projects. That worked most of the time and sometimes it meant we had to change how we were approaching it. Transparency and all those decisions are based on principle, not on personal preference.

Ken: This community has a fascinating profile because it has one foot still rooted in the Pioneer Experience. Because you can still talk to people who live in this community, whose families have been here for four or five generations.

[Conversation is interrupted to address a technical issue with recording equipment.]

We were talking about the long-time resident who says “Don’t change”

Kelvyn: Change is inevitable, it’s going to happen. The question is “Are you going to plan for it, or do you just want to let it happen? What we would try to help people understand is, we are trying to plan the future—not just let it happen. And by doing that, most people would say: Okay, I get it. We’re going to try to protect these areas. These areas we feel need to be redeveloped. The very place where City Hall stands, is an area that we felt like was a little bit blighted. We really don’t have anything “truly blighted” in Cottonwood Heights, but it was some of the properties that were a little more “run down” than others. And that said, and the decision to put this here, some people said “Oh gee, we liked having those homes across from the high school.” But now, the next generation is living with the fact that “This is City Hall.” So, I recognize that there were things that had value and needed to be preserved, and we tried to be sensitive to those kinds of things, but they needed to be *truly* based upon reasons that were historical purposes or otherwise, needed to be preserved, as opposed to people’s personal preferences. That’s where the line usually got drawn on this—is there really a valid position here or is this just someone’s personal preference? And then, we try to explain that we’re trying to plan for the future, we’re trying to plan for the changes that are coming, so that they happen in a way that they are conditioned to maintaining our community in the best way possible. But, you can’t stop them. And, if you do try and stop it, you get run over.

Ken: I appreciate you introducing the theme of the building which we are in. ... Was this always the vision, that you thought when the city coalesced and came together, that one day there would be a city hall?

Kelvyn: I figured that there would be a city hall one day. But when we first incorporated, we didn't feel we needed a city hall. And we told people "No, we're not going to go and build some "palace." We are going to work within the framework of the office spaces available here—and we did." But after 10 years of doing that, we recognized the difficulties of carrying out the public's business on private property. It became very challenging, because our landlord at the time would say "Hey, we need you to do this or this." Well we've got to stay open for our citizens. People were protesting. Their protests...were interfering with private business. There was no "town square," if you will, for people to be heard. Yes, we've got an office and you can come and speak. But, as we started looking at it, and projecting out rents, and things of that nature, and started doing the math, and we recognized that not only could we provide a city hall that would give a sense of place for the city, and an opportunity for interaction, so we could have our own "town square" and that financially, over time, it would pay out—not initially, but over time, and it would save the city money. So, initially many thought we didn't need a city hall, but ever since we built City Hall, the majority of people said "Hey, it's great to have our own home, our own place in the city. Some are more critical, they feel like it was money that didn't need to be spent, but you're not going to please everybody, so we just felt like if we were going to build a city hall, we were going to build it right and we want it to be something the citizens will be proud of.

Ken: Many cities point to a town square. In Salt Lake City, obviously you can point to a couple of focal points and say "This is the heart of the City." What is the "heart" of Cottonwood Heights as you view it?

Kelvyn: Well, we looked at that when we tried to build City Hall, because anywhere that we put city hall would be considered kind of the center point of the city. As we looked at opportunities of where we could build and that were financially reasonable, we recognized that the main thoroughfare was Ft. Union Boulevard. We tried to find something there, or on Highland Drive. But then, putting the city hall here worked to our advantage, because what we have in the center part of the city, is our high school across the street, we have the City Hall, we have the CH Rec Center (just to the east of us), and the CH Middle School (just

to the east of us), and our biggest Park (just to the east of us). So from a “public facilities point of view, this is the heart of the city and this became an anchor for the heart of the city. If you’re looking at commercial-wise, and where is “down town, so to speak,” that’s the one thing we have never really been able to put together is “Where is downtown?” You say you’re in Cottonwood Heights, where is Cottonwood Heights, is it Park Center Shopping Area? Is it Highland and Ft. Union? Where is it exactly? And so, this basically anchored what we considered the public plaza of the city, which is the schools and parks and Rec Center.

Ken: Twelve years as mayor.

Kelvyn: Thirteen, actually.

Ken: Thirteen. That indelicate balance of running a business in your private life, and being the chief elected officer for a brand-new city—reflect on those 13 years of trying to keep both going. And I don’t mean to be blunt, but did something suffer in the process?

Kelvyn: Probably both. There were times when I should have spent more time on my business and there were times that I should have spent more time on City matters. I had an obligation, because we were a public company, to make sure I did not short-change my business. I’m sure there are things, if I had not been doing the city stuff, I’m sure there was more I could have done for my company, and I’m sure there were those who felt I was short-changing them somehow. I looked at it more in the sense that everybody has a hobby, right? Some people golf, some people boat, some people travel. My hobby was politics! When I wasn’t working, I was being mayor. I mean, it was that simple. I had four buckets that I put my time into: I had Mayor, Church, Family and Business. It was a constant balancing act. Fortunately, I had a wife who made sure I kept the balance right. That was really important, because it could be challenging. I’m sure there were times when I could have done more for the City, if I had spent more time. But the nature of a part-time mayor is just that—you don’t have the time to do everything that you think you could do. And so, if I erred at all, it was in giving time to my business, because until this city hall was built, I never even had an office in city hall. So for the first 10 or 11 years I was mayor, I didn’t even have an office, I did everything out of my [private] business office. I’d have to run over to City Hall for a meeting, but I didn’t have an office there

Ken: Let me ask you two unfair questions. The first one is to unfairly ask you, when you left office after 13 years, what were you most proud of or most satisfied with that you saw in this city that was able to come to life while you were mayor?

Kelvyn: (Sigh) I'm going to answer that with maybe two things. Obviously, very few people get the opportunity to start a city. I'm the only entrepreneur in the state, I think, who started a medical device company *and* started a city. Those are two very unique experiences, and so seeing the city get on strong financial footing, to be able to say we never had to raise taxes while I was mayor and we were able to build Cottonwood Heights into a credibly well-respected member of the municipal community, that was something I was genuinely proud of. And the components of that included the municipal services we were able to provide, creating the police department—that was a big 'plus' that was a big accomplishment, and getting the city on a strong financial footing, and having people be proud to live in Cottonwood Heights, that was Number One.

The thing that really made a big difference, that most people maybe don't realize, was starting the Canyons School District. I was Chair of the Mayor's Committee that was exploring that, and then I headed up the effort to create the Canyon School District, running the legislation and getting things changed. That one thing did more for this City than maybe anything else that happened. It really had an effect. Because, at the time, people may not remember this, but at the time Jordan School District was one of the 20 largest school districts in the country. They were not responsive to any suggestions, they were an entity unto themselves. I was on their Foundation Board, and I did a lot of things to help Jordan School District. They asked me why I had turned on them when we started to create Canyons District. They were closing schools, they had shuttered two elementary schools in our City. We had a middle school that was over 50 years old and didn't have enough electrical systems to run a good computer lab. We had an elementary school that was 80 years old. It was a rundown academic environment. So, people would come into our city, and were looking to live here, they would look around and say closed school, closed school, old schools, this is not very attractive. By creating Canyons District, we were able to separate the needs of those on the west side, from the needs of those on the east side. Because in 2003, the school district had promised that 25% of \$250 million bond would be spent renovating our schools (3% was spent on this). I wasn't being belligerent about the needs of the west side, I was just pointing out they were in an intractable situation, they could not fairly meet the needs of both sides. And

so, by creating the Canyons District, look what's happened since Canyons was formed? Taxes for the school district have only gone up, like, 4%, that's the maximum its gone up. And yet what they've been able to do is we now have a brand-new middle school. Where the closed elementary school was next to it is an expanded community park. The other elementary school that closed, we did a deal with the district to lease that for \$1 a year for 50 or 100 years and created Mountain View Park, which has become one of the most popular parks in our community. We have a brand-new Butler Elementary School, state of the art, and we're getting a brand-new High School. People come to this community now, and what do you think has happened to property values in Cottonwood Heights? A lot of that is because people recognize the value of the educational system and the facilities here. We look like a "Gleaming City on the Hill" because of all the facilities that we have. A Rec Center that performs as the best in the state, a brand-new middle school, a brand-new high school, brand new elementary school, brand new parks. I mean, you ask what am I most proud of? I am most proud, probably, of what we accomplished in setting up the Canyons School District and the benefits that derived from that for citizens.

Ken: You leave all this, was there a sense of disappointment, of unfinished business? Something you couldn't get your hands on, something that you really wanted to?

Kelvyn: There really wasn't. There were always policy issues, but having the City now to a point where it was much more mature, the kind of issues we were dealing with were becoming more routine, not quite as challenging. And so, there were no big things left that I wanted to accomplish, which is part of the reason why I chose not to run for a fourth term. Certainly, there were policy issues, you can ask my City Manager, even the new Mayor, as he took over. In the last six months, once I had a list of things I wanted to get done before I left office, once a week we would go over the list—what have we got done, what have we not got done? Some of them didn't happen. We got a lot of them checked off, handed the list to Mayor Peterson and he took over.

Ken: Ah, speaking of Mayor Peterson, and incoming Mayor Weichers, you've cared deeply about who will lead this city after you leave office. Some people feel like a weight has been lifted off their shoulders when they leave the office and they say: That's it for me! I gave you 13 years of my life. But you stayed closely connected with the process of leading the city. Why?

Kelvyn: (Sigh) You know, part of my leadership style was to build relationships, and when I left office, what I was going to miss most and what I did miss most, were the personal relationships. The police officers, the firemen, the city workers, the city staff. They were all dear friends, and I wanted them to have a good environment. The Council Members that had been elected, I knew them all and they were my friends. So, when you are as invested as I was in others who were also invested in creating the city and making it, and seeing the vision of what it could be, that doesn't end just because you're out of office. If you truly love the community, you don't just say, 'Okay, I've got to be going,' and that's it. You've got to be engaged, you've got to improve. I tried to do that. I tried to be sensitive so Mayor Peterson didn't feel like I was shadowing him or anything. I loved his leadership, he did a great job. But, I did feel there were things I could contribute and I would try to do that. A lot of that was *behind the scenes*. If Mayor Peterson needed help with something, or one of the Council members would ask me to help with something, I would engage, give my opinion on things, but recognizing that I don't make those decisions for the city any more, but I'm still a citizen and my voice counts. So I would try and be engaged because I still live here, I want this to be the best city in the state. I've always wanted that and if I ever move out of Cottonwood Heights, then maybe I'd feel different. But we chose to remodel our house, stay where we're at, and we bought our burial plots and have our cemetery headstone already with my name on it, up at Mountain View Cemetery right up here on Bengal Boulevard! (Chuckle) So, I don't think I'm going anywhere!!

Ken: You mentioned the lighthearted comment of Mayor Dolan from Sandy saying, "The great lie of being parttime mayor." That aside, was there something about being an elected mayor that surprised you? You'd done all the work leading up to incorporation, but did you have an "Ah Hah Moment" or an "Oh My" moment where you said, "This is what it means to be Mayor."

Kelvyn: I've been in a lot of leadership positions throughout my life, and so I wasn't so surprised by the leadership responsibilities. I was surprised by the amount of work that was required. I sorely underestimated the amount of work that was required to do the job right. And, there were times when I realized I had just gotten more to do than I could possibly do and having to make decisions on what was going to get done and what wasn't and it was hard, because I'm a driven person, I like to get it all done. But I realized about the first year—ramping up and you're doing things *one step at a time*, and the very first day we were a city and

my city manager was trying to buy supplies with her credit card, and how do we handle this!—just everything from “How do you reimburse an employee?” just building everything around that. That was all fun, and easy to do, but then when the heavier lifting started arriving and you get Tavaci and some very controversial things...

[Editor’s Note: The “Tavaci Development” was a project proposed to develop 90 acres of residential “resort-style” real estate east of Wasatch Boulevard near the mouth of Big Cottonwood Canyon. Cottonwood Heights City government, led by Mayor Cullimore, opposed the development. In 2012 the property was removed from the boundaries of Cottonwood Heights City and received status as an unincorporated area of Salt Lake County.]

Ken: How did you cope?

Kelvyn: Well, I’m fairly thick-skinned, yet I was surprised at how vitriolic people could be sometimes. And how angry they could be. And how sometimes that people who have known you for decades, but now that you have the title of Mayor, you somehow are “Part of the Dark Side,” and they can treat you differently. I think the “Ah Ha Moment” for me was probably when a neighbor called and berated me on something, and I stopped said “So and So, this is Kelvyn that you’re talking to. The same person you talked to a year ago about these kinds of things. It’s kind of like they stopped for a minute, and they just said, “I’m so sorry, I just got carried away!” Yah, you did!! But that happened with some frequency. You got to where people just felt you were fair game, and you had to learn to be fairly thick skinned. My wife, one time, came to me and just said “Okay, so, I want to know where is all this money that people are putting in your pocket?” (chuckle). And so it was interesting. You had to be thick skinned, and so, while I thought I was prepared for the amount of work and some of the negative aspects of public service, that still caught me a little off guard. I found I had to really work, sometimes, to stop being reactive.

Ken: To lead a corporation, you can sometimes employ dozens or hundreds or even thousands of people, but, you don’t put them out knowing they can go in *harm’s way*. And, you were a mayor of a city with a police department where men and women go out, each day, with a badge, to try to protect and try to serve. Tell me about that role of seeing these people serve.

Kelvyn: Yes, and there were times when things happened and I would call the officers personally, or I would go to their home. Same with the fire fighters. We would have a serious fire going on and I would show up to say, “How can I help?” If nothing else, just to let them know I was supportive, because people don’t understand. I can remember talking to an officer who had to go up the canyon because a family was worried about an older juvenile that had disappeared, and so they came back in tears to tell me about how they had to go up and they found the young man had hung himself and they had to cut him down and bring his body down. Or times when there was a shooting, and someone had been killed, and they went in and the family was going to come in, and so they spent time cleaning the house, getting rid of the blood, so it wasn’t such a traumatic thing for the family. Or an officer who found a little boy’s bike had been stolen, and out of his own pocket, bought a new bike for the kid, never expecting anybody to find out. He did it because of his own concern. I found that our police officers and our fire fighters were people who felt that they had a mission or calling, because you can’t pay those people enough. You can’t pay them what they are worth. And so they are doing a job that, in my opinion, is thankless, and that is part of the reason why I got so angry about how some of our Police Department was treated after I left office, and a particular council woman who had it in for our police. They just don’t understand, they don’t understand what we ask of these men and women who go out to protect and serve, or to fight fires, or to respond to medical emergencies, and what they deal with day in and day out. I made a particular effort to know everybody by name. I wanted to be able to find and look at an officer and be able to know about him and his family and we would do things, and I would always go to the spouses, and thank them for allowing their spouse to be a police officer, or thank them for allowing their spouse to work in the fire department. Because, that is the Heart of what our city provides to its citizens and to give anything but unfettered support to those first responders, is a travesty in my opinion. I’m not saying that there are not “bad seeds” from time to time, that have to be dealt with—and we had to deal with a few of those. One very high profile one, in fact, I trusted in the leadership that we had selected, and knew that they knew how to handle those situations, and I gave them the leeway and the tools to do that. By far, the majority of those men and women who served were very, very, good people—people that I loved and that I trusted, and I appreciated very much.

Ken: Another question I was going to ask: What was your favorite part of being mayor for 13 years? I mean, the part where you *glowed*?

Kelvyn: Probably the things which I just mentioned. Making the improvements in the City and the thing that I liked the best...the Pay Days, as I call it...were when employees of the city would come up and express appreciation, that they loved working in the city. Or, that citizens would come up and say how proud they were to be part of Cottonwood Heights. And to create the aura of the city where people were proud to be part of the city. To me, those were the paydays—going to Butlerville Days, and having citizens just having “a ball!” Then have the people tell me afterwards, just how great it is to live in this city, how much they appreciate all the things that are being done, and that was being done frugally. The people really felt like they had a sense of community, which is one of the reasons we incorporated in the first place. We wanted people to feel they had a special place. So, for me, those were the things.

Ken: My final question goes back to the very reason we do oral history to begin with. And that is to touch “an unborn generation.” Twenty-five, fifty years from now, a young man or young woman sits down and says: “Geez, I wonder what Cottonwood Heights was thinking when they made this a city? Why did they do this? Why did they do that?” Sit down with that person, Kelvyn Cullimore, Jr. Fifty years from now, what do you hope they understand about this city coming into existence? What do you hope they will carry forward?

Kelvyn: Wow! Those are loaded questions! I hope they recognize that the city was formed out of a sense of Community Pride. That those who did so wanted to provide services at the highest level, control the services and the taxes and the reputation of our community, and did it in a way that, we hoped, would build in the community that future generations would be proud. That they wouldn’t take for granted things that we had worked hard to create in the beginning. And so, my hope would be, in retrospect, they would look at that and recognize that people sacrificed a lot. There were a lot of people who put in a lot of effort in making this city what it is today. And there will be many to follow, who will do the same thing! And for them, I would hope that they will recognize the importance of being a part of their community. The city is not just somewhere where you have a home, it’s where you live your life. What you do in that city makes a difference, it makes a difference for you, for your neighbors, so GET ENGAGED, help participate, have pride in who you have as elected officials—if you don’t have pride in them—elect ones that you do and, be a voice. But be a voice of reason, a voice of community, and work to build, as opposed to tear down, and I think if

they make that effort, the city can continue to be the kind of place where everybody wants to live.

Cottonwood Heights, I think, I had someone tell me one time and it was one of the best compliments I could have received, they said, “We are shocked that Cottonwood Heights went from an unincorporated city to one of the top cities in the State in such a short period of time.” Is that really what makes us one of the top cities in the state? Everything you do is right? I asked, “Did you hear about our snow plowing?” “Okay! Maybe not everything!!” (chuckle) But, you know, they recognize, I mean the accolades from outside of the community, people recognizing the accomplishments of the city and the work that the citizens will put in, and the *pride* that exists here. That was really an important day for me—that was probably one of my biggest days—when you get outside confirmation that other people see you the way that you hope you will be seen.

END