

Kent Perkins Interview
Interviewed by Loren Webb

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Participants: Loren Webb (Interviewer)
Kent Eugene Perkins (Interviewee)

Location of Interview: St. George, Utah

Transcribed by: Susan Mower

Webb: Welcome. My name is Loren Webb with the Washington County Historical Society. And today with us is Kent Perkins with the St. George City Leisure Services Department. He is now retired. Today's date is May 5, 2025. Kent, what is your full name?

Perkins: Kent Eugene Perkins.

Webb: Okay. And when did you become interested in city government?

Perkins: Well, my first job with a city was in the late 1970s when I worked for the City of Newark, Delaware.

Webb: Okay. And what were you doing?

Perkins: I was the Assistant Director of Parks and Recreation back then.

Webb: Okay. And how long were you there?

Perkins: Five years.

Webb: And then what made you decide to look elsewhere?

Perkins: Well, a lot of factors. My wife was really interested in moving back to the west where we had actually started, and although I felt like the opportunities professionally were more in the East Coast, we decided, and a number of other factors, to look to the West. And so we received three offers to interview back in Utah, and I thought, well, that sounds pretty good, so let's go and interview.

Webb: And where were those three interviews?

Perkins: One was in Kearns. One was the City of Provo. And one was the City of St. George.

Webb: Okay. And you took the one in St. George?

Perkins: I did.

Webb: Okay. So when did you decide to apply to work with St. George City Leisure Services Department?

Perkins: It was in 1982.

Webb: Okay. And when did you decide, well, how long did you work there, for the Department, before you became the Director? What did you do?

Perkins: I was the Director.

Webb: You were the Director, so you were hired directly as a Director?

Perkins: I was.

Webb: Okay. So what made you decide to apply to become the Director?

Perkins: Well, I was an Assistant Director at the time, and it was a professional upward mobility type of a thing, and so I was given the opportunity to work there or in Provo as another assistant. And I felt like St. George was on what I called the crest of the wave, and so I determined that this would be a good fit for me and my family.

Webb: Okay. What were your duties as City Leisure Services Department Director?

Perkins: Well, my first responsibility was to create a department because there hadn't been a Leisure Services Department. There had been a number of departments, and so we took the Recreation Department and the Parks Department and the Cemeteries and the swimming pool and the cultural arts and the old County airport and the golf course and put them all together into one department. And that was my responsibility.

Webb: How many divisions were there?

Perkins: Four or five.

Webb: Four or five. Okay. During your tenure as the director, when did you get the idea to begin the St. George Marathon?

Perkins: Well, I actually didn't begin the St. George Marathon.

Webb: I thought you did.

Perkins: Well, thank you, but I didn't.

Webb: Everybody thought it was you that started the Marathon.

Perkins: So the Marathon actually started, Sherm Miller came up with the idea of starting a marathon after he'd run a marathon up in Salt Lake City. And so he brought that idea to St. George in 1976.

Webb: Okay. And was he working for the Department?

Perkins: He was. He was the Recreation Director at that time. And so I actually started in '82. And so the race was actually six years old.

Webb: Six years old, okay. So tell us a little about how it got started.

Perkins: Well, indicating that Sherm was into running and he went to Salt Lake City and ran in their 24th of July marathon in Salt Lake City, and he felt like that it would be a good fit for St. George, and so he took the idea back to St. George. I think he even used somewhat the same kind of a name for the marathon at that time. And he went to the Exchange Club and sought some help from them, and the City of St. George and the Exchange Club together decided that they could pull this off. So the first year, I think they had 43 runners, or something like that.

Webb: And where was the route? Where did they decide to do the route?

Perkins: The town of Central up the highway towards Pine Valley is where they started and actually finished at the Bluff Street Park. And a year or two later, maybe even the next year, they determined that needed to be changed. So they moved the start over to Highway 18 in Central and brought it all the way down Bluff Street all the way to Worthen Park on 300 South.

Webb: Where was the route before? You said it wasn't directly on State Route 18?

Perkins: They didn't start on 18.

Webb: They did not start on 18?

Perkins: They started on Pine Valley Road.

Webb: They started on Pine Valley Road. Okay.

Perkins: Yes. So they moved it over and brought it down Pine Valley Road, came down into St. George.

Webb: Okay. And that remained the route ever since?

Perkins: And a number of years, as St. George continued to grow, then Bluff Street became a very busy, as you know, road, and so we changed the route, and I can't tell you for sure what year it was. But we changed the route when Bluff Street came down and got to

Diagonal, then we got off of Bluff Street at that point in time and went down Diagonal, went down 300 West, came over Main Street.

Webb: How many years did it stay at that route?

Perkins: The new route is, after we made that change, it's been forever. It's THE route.

Webb: Okay. So what running categories did Sherm Miller and later yourself create, you know, as the St. George Marathon was being developed?

Perkins: Well, we did five-year age categories, the youngest category being 18 and under. Typically kids less than that age, we don't go any smaller. Most races are pretty much 18 and older throughout the United States. So we went as high as there were runners, so we had people who were in their 80s even, running. So you know, 80, 85, 90 type of thing. We also had a category for wheel chairs. And that actually continued until just a few years ago. I think a year or so, two years maybe, after I retired, they eliminated the wheel chair division. And also we had a hand cycle division that we ran for the last few years. But that one is no longer being used.

Webb: Okay. What logistical infrastructure was needed prior to holding the Marathon, during the first Saturday of October, and how did you decide on the date?

Perkins: Well, the date was set. It was always, it became the first Saturday. They looked it over, the race calendar, and determined where there were gaps. It also is LDS Conference weekend, and typically that's a travel weekend for St. George. A lot of people come to St. George. And so they just determined that would be the weekend they wanted to run it. So it has always stayed as the first Saturday in October.

Webb: Okay. So tell us a little bit about the logistical infrastructure. What does it take to set up a marathon?

Perkins: A lot of work, primarily at the finish line and the starting line. Those are the two factors that are major. Over the years at the starting line with approval of UDOT, my department was able to go in and to improve the site at the start of the race. Initially it was essentially just the road, and we started on the road, and it was a couple of spots you can pull off to the side. But as the race grew, it became incredibly important that we created more of a defined starting area. The first year that I was with the race, they started on the highway, but they had to have rest rooms and those kinds of things, and those were back in, there used to be an area where they had, it was set up dumpsters essentially, and it was a dumping area. And there was a circle of dumpsters. And that was the only area that was available for the runners to congregate, which was not particularly positive. And so what we got approval to do was to go into the right-of-way and to clean it up. And so over the years our department went in, and we graded and cleaned and did all kind of things. One of the first years that the race started, the wheelchairs offloaded their vehicles, and they hadn't gone a couple of miles into the race and a lot of them got flat tires because of the puncture weed that was along the side

of the road. Well, that was not going to work. So we essentially went up and cleaned it up and brought in gravel and graded. And now if you go on the site, you'll recognize that that whole area is just one big wide maintained area. We had to go in, and we identified locations for the starting line, putting markers, those kinds of things.

Webb: And what about, tell us about the buses and the port-a-potties. I mean there had to have been a lot of buses and a lot of port-a-potties.

Perkins: We used every bus that was available in Washington County, and then we started bringing in buses from Iron County. Port-a-potty-wise, we used every port-a-john that was available in the entire area. And we went clear up into the Richfield area.

Webb: Wow. And didn't, at the beginning, didn't they also build fires to keep them warm?

Perkins: Yeah. And we put bonfires, I don't know how many feet, but we built them a long stretch of bonfires in the early morning hours for the runners to stand by.

Webb: And then they had some kind of a, I don't know, some kind of a dinner the night before, to build up their protein, or I don't know, whatever.

Perkins: Yeah, the old pasta dinner.

Webb: Yeah, the pasta dinner.

Perkins: That went on for years. The Exchange Club was involved with that initially. Then at one time we actually came over to this campus [Utah Tech University] and put on a dinner. In fact, for several years we've put on a dinner here at the old Student building, and one year at the Arts, well, actually, it was always at the Student building.

Webb: Here at Utah Tech?

Perkins: At Utah Tech. Then I think in the last few years that, the dinner has been eliminated. We moved the entire, boy, you want me to just go on and on?

Webb: Yes.

Perkins: All right. So here's the deal.

Webb: Well, it's interesting because a lot of people don't know the history of how it evolved.

Perkins: Initially, the first dinners were held over at what used to be a kind of convention center over on the Boulevard, and the Exchange Club put on the dinner. Then they moved over, and we did it here at the Utah Tech. And then we started having an Expo. We were underneath the arts building, and we had a few booths set up as our very first Expo. And then when the original Dixie Center was built, we ended up moving our Expo down there, and our dinner down to that location. And we were in a variety of

different layouts down at that particular site. And then when the new Dixie Center was built, we ended up moving there and took the entire operation there. And so the night before the race, the entire Dixie Center, for the most part, was set up to accommodate a huge Expo, along with dinner and a variety of speakers, etc. And that has become a very large part of the event. So that whole Friday before, that's where the number distribution takes place. At one time the people would come to the Art Center over on Main Street and pick up their numbers. And they'd wander in and get their numbers, and wander out, that type of thing. And so we went from that little tiny kind of a setting to where now we have this full-scale, you know, setup down at the Dixie Center.

Webb: Okay. So tell us about the end. You said there's a lot involved at the end of the race.

Perkins: Well, a big part of a marathon is accuracy. And you have to be the exact distance, and so over the years we've done a number of official measurements of the course. That's usually done by bicycle, believe it or not. We have a little device called a Jones Counter and sits on the wheels, and you have to ride the race at a certain course a number of times, and then you have to do all these statistical calculations. But every time the road is widened, every time UDOT does anything to the road of significance, we have to go back and re-measure the course because it has to be exactly the right length. And so over the years, the finish line, which is at the Vernon Worthen Park, has done this kind of thing. It's moved from here to here to here to here because of those official measurements having to take place when there have been changes to the road—when we changed the course, when UDOT changes the width of the course, or whatever it might be. And so we finally identified, in the last couple of years, the course finish line is pretty well set. There's not a lot of change that can happen on the course. We say that, and who knows, maybe they straighten out a curve or something. But anyway, and at the Park itself, it's a huge event. There are thousands of people that attend. And so we have to accommodate that with all of our fencing and all of our bleachers and all of our booths and on and on and on, clothing retrieval, etc.

Webb: Okay. So how many volunteers does the Department use each year to support the Marathon?

Perkins: Well, it varies from year to year. Probably it would be a couple thousand, 1,500 to 2000.

Webb: What areas are they involved with? What do they do? What do the volunteers do?

Perkins: Well, they have aid stations on the course, and every aid station then has a number of individuals who are handing out water and Gatorade and cleaning up the course after the runners, etc., etc. There are people at the finish line who hand out medallions who make sure the runners, if they come across the line and happen to fall or have a problem, they move them into the aid area. The IHC [Intermountain Health Care] provides that first-aid area and their volunteers volunteering for this event. We have people at the starting line who are helping with the setup and cleanup. We have people in the Park who are handing out water and juice and ice cream and bread and etc., etc.,

who are helping to get the runners all the clothing back to them. We have people, communications people, who volunteer. It's so many volunteers.

Webb: How many full-time staff do you have?

Perkins: All of them.

Webb: How many is that? How is it arranged?

Perkins: I don't know, having not been there for a few years, the department size.

Webb: But when you were there?

Perkins: We probably had 70 to 80 full-time individuals and a whole bunch of part-time people.

Webb: But all of them. Okay. All of them were involved.

Perkins: Yeah. One of the biggest volunteer areas is that we have a delegation coming from Japan. And that's a whole other story. And we have volunteers, people who host them in their homes. And we have interpreters who help us, help during that process, and go with them and travel around with them around the area and volunteer their time as interpreters.

Webb: This takes a lot of coordination. How did that develop? What did it take? How many kinds of meetings? Were there a lot of meetings to get this thing going throughout the year, or did you start at a certain time period prior to the Marathon? How did that work?

Perkins: Well, our clock was based on the fact that we have the Art Festival in the spring, and we have the Marathon in the fall. And besides all the other things that we do, those are the two major events that draw basically a lot of our time. And so when the Art Festival is finished, then immediately we're into planning for the Marathon. And when the Marathon is finished, immediately we're into planning for the Art Festival. But because the Marathon became so big that we got to a point where we had staff that were year around focused on different aspects of it, sponsorships and material acquisition and registration processes and all those other kinds of things. And so in many ways the Marathon is kind of a year-around thing. The Art Festival isn't quite there yet as far as year-around, but it takes up nine months or ten months or something like that.

Webb: Wow. So what have been some stand-out marathons, any that just were really out there?

Perkins: Well, I've been, 34, I was involved with. The first one [in 1982] was a stand-out because it was my first one, and when I got to the start, I realized that it was raining like crazy, and we had very few lights to light the area. And so it was kind of a, holy cow, what have we got going here? We can't see each other, the rain is pouring down. But

runners had found huge sheets of plastic, and I don't know, maybe they brought them with them, or whatever it might be. And so they looked like a thousand-legged centipede or something because they would hold the plastic up above them, and even as they were running the first while, underneath these giant sheets of plastic. We had very few port-a-johns available. We didn't have any lights. We didn't, we had a megaphone, and that was pretty much it. And we had a guest starter, and it was Fullmer [Gene], the boxer. And I taught him how to start a race, told him to hold the gun out here. And he held it right here.

Webb: Oh, no. It hurt his ears.

Perkins: He said, "It's no worse than laying on a mat when at the end of a round you know, "ding." Anyway, that first year was fraught with all kinds of issues—the rain, etc. We had a plastic tarp over the computer at the finish line, and the water would run down and drop on the people. It was pretty crazy. Obviously we improved from then on out. The next one that stands out to me was we had the national masters championships. We were the only community of our size to ever host a national masters championship. And the race went very well, and it was a kind of a breakthrough for St. George. The next one was when Boston was celebrating its, I think, hundredth birthday, if I remember right, and they decided that they were going to do something special, so they opened it up to a lot more runners, and so we decided because a lot of our runners qualified on our course to go to Boston, so we tried to do a few extra-special things, and *Runner's World*, the largest running magazine in the world, contacted us and said we know that you guys are a fast course that a lot of runners are going to come to St. George to qualify for Boston, so we'd like to send all of our editors over. And what we'll do is we'll create a pacing team, and we'll help runners reach their qualifications standards. And so they sent like a dozen editors from their magazine over. Each one of them took a different time, and had a flag. And if you ran with that runner, your odds were very good that you would be able to qualify in your age group for Boston. Well, they did a major article on us in the national *Runner's World*, and our numbers went [made a sound]. And they loved it. The fun thing about them is we didn't, the town was full, and there weren't that many motels, whatever, and when they finally notified us, everything was full. And so we ended up putting them up in the third floor of the hospital that was doing renovations that hadn't opened yet. So they gave us permission to be able to sleep people.

Webb: Is this over on River Road, or 400 East?

Perkins: No, the old hospital.

Webb: The old hospital [on 400 East].

Perkins: So we had people, they were in hospital beds. That was memorable for them.

Webb: That is definitely memorable.

Perkins: That was a great year. And because it went really well, we got a lot of national notoriety. And so from then on, we became one of the hot races to get into, and it became such a difficult thing to get into our race because we had to set a cap because we couldn't accommodate people, buses.

Webb: What was that cap? Was it 6,000 or 4,000?

Perkins: Well, every year it changed. Every time we built a new motel, we changed the cap. In fact, my very first year we had created a cap. We called it the philosophy of bigness, and basically we determined that we couldn't run a race effectively and efficiently if we were bigger than we could accommodate. That makes sense, I guess. So we calculated how many hotel rooms we had and how many buses, whatever, and we set a cap. And we hit our cap, and had to shut it off at 2,207 was our cap. And we were kind of growing incrementally until that *Runner's World* magazine article. And then it went through the roof. And we would close the registration in one day. People would drive from California and be—

Webb: Oh my gosh, in one day!

Perkins: In one day. People would, we tried a lottery system with the big old lottery barrel, and that became, people would write, send envelopes with funny drawings on them and little flags and things, "Please, please select me," you know, that kind of thing. And so that was not sustainable, so we decided we needed to come up with some other way. We set a deadline, and it started filling up, like I said, in one day. People would drive from southern California to St. George to be here on the morning that it opened to make sure that people would get in. And people from Alabama and Arkansas and Georgia and Florida would yell and scream and say, "You know, your deadline is this date, but there is no way we can get our stuff in faster than anybody else." So then we came up with all kinds of different ways to get people in that was more fair, because we were growing so fast, and people wanted to get in so quickly.

Webb: Where was it when you finally retired? When did you retire?

Perkins: In 2017.

Webb: Okay, so that year, what was the cap, approximately, do you remember, if you remember?

Perkins: Oh, it was 75 or 82 or something like that.

Webb: Wow, 7,500, 8,200?

Perkins: Yeah. One year we set the cap at something like 7,000, and we had over 10,000 entries.

Webb: Oh, wow. So tell us just a little about the media coverage. You've already talked about *Runner's World*. I guess you've had all kinds of media coverage, right?

Perkins: Well, yeah. We had radio, obviously the radio, *The Spectrum* was at one point there and obviously did the results, and there was really good coverage back in the day.

Webb: Do you get that kind of coverage with *St. George News* now and all the individual listings?

Perkins: I really don't know, not the same kind of coverage, but you know we used to get full-page spreads. But there was a time when KUTV out of Salt Lake City did live coverage and actually brought cameras down, and there is a story that goes with that. One year when they were doing live coverage, they had a kind of a boom on their truck. And they were following the lead woman runner, and she was way ahead of the national best time, and they thought she was going to set a national record, which she ended up doing. And she, somehow the boom or whatever it was, hit a power line, and the line hit the ground in front of her and sparked, and she had to dodge the line, or that electric whatever it was. And she said that was probably part of the reason why she set the record is she had to get through there so fast. But anyway, they did live coverage for a while, and then they backed off. So we really haven't had any live coverage for years.

Webb: Okay. Where's the St. George Marathon ranked nationally?

Perkins: Right now it's number 20 in terms of number of finishers.

Webb: Okay. You've already talked pretty much about the changes that were made at Worthen Park, right, to accommodate. I've noticed that eventually they were finally able to put a cement walkway all the way around the park. They didn't have that for many years, right?

Perkins: Right.

Webb: Anything else that stands out about Worthen Park?

Perkins: Well, we put in the new gazebo there in the center of the Park, and that became a site for our awards category, which was really nice. Of course there's a lot of changes to the Park, but most don't relate specifically to the Marathon.

Webb: Okay. Where was the St. George Leisure Services Department originally housed, and how has that changed over the years?

Perkins: Oh, boy. Well, the Parks of the Department, the Recreation and the Parks, were housed in the old swimming pool building, and Parks was down in the basement, and that's a place you don't want to go, or didn't want to go, but that's where they were. And Recreation was up above in the old pool building. Cultural Arts was over in the Arts

Center. And the other facilities had their own sites. But, so my first office was in what is now the Utility Office, or the HR [Human Resources] Office actually.

Webb: Where was that?

Perkins: That was up at City Hall. And then we moved down, after doing some renovation, moved down to the Arts Center, the old Dixie High building.

Webb: Yeah, Dixie Academy building. So you were at 175 North 200 East at one point? And then you moved down to the Dixie Academy building. Okay.

Perkins: And that's where we stayed until, I don't know, about ten years ago or something, and we moved up to, and we renovated the old Commons building, which is the old County Courthouse.

Webb: The Hall of Justice building?

Perkins: The State Court House, the Hall of Justice.

Webb: The Hall of Justice building.

Perkins: Yeah. We renovated that facility, and then Leisure Services moved into that building.

Webb: Across the street from the current City Office. Okay.

Perkins: Leisure Services, by the way, is no longer called Leisure Services.

Webb: What is it called now?

Perkins: Parks and Community Services.

Webb: Parks and Community Services. Okay. Tell us about the City Parks and Recreation Department. Who had the vision to create the large number of City parks as well as network of City trails?

Perkins: Well, that department and Leisure Service Department are one and the same, right?

Webb: Right.

Perkins: Okay. So back in the early eighties, a land planner by the name of Ira Hodges and myself spent a lot of—he came from the East Coast, and so did I, well, actually from the same area. He was in Delaware the same time I was there. I didn't know him at the time. But before we left, somebody said, "You ought to look up Ira Hodges; I think he moved to St. George." And so when we got here, I looked him up and found out that he and I had a lot in common. So we spent a lot of time, and our favorite thing was to walk around the community, and as he said, wave our hands and talk about the things

that could be. And having been on the East coast, in more established cities, we recognized that there was tremendous potential in St. George for a lot of things. And so we decided that maybe we ought to kind of put all of our dreams on paper. And so we talked a lot about what could be, and so things like the trail system, the park system, and then we started looking at the area and said, you know, there are things here that are really important that we don't want to lose, things that draw people to St. George. And so we called that the critical areas. And those are the rivers and the hillsides and the other things, wetlands and stuff. Then we talked about beautification, and what could be done to beautify the community, etc. etc. And we put together five or six different master plans. And then we went to the City Manager and presented all of our ideas. And he suggested that we put them all together into one plan. And so we called it the critical areas plan. And out of that critical areas plan, then was created a Critical Areas Plan Committee and a Hillside Committee, and out of that Hillside Committee became a Hillside Review Board and all of the regulations that go to protect our hillsides. And then out of the Critical Areas Plan then were the idea that we would try to protect and preserve all of the river corridors in the community and a lot of other sensitive areas. And from that initial thing came the master plan for the trail system, for the park system, for the beautification program which included the shade tree program and all the beautification of the entryways into the City, all of the landscaping that you see and all the rights of ways, the landscape program that is implemented through the Planning Department for all the new development, etc., and all the major right-of-ways.

Webb: How many City parks do we have, and how many miles of trail, approximately?

Perkins: Well, I think the trails are up in the 70s or 80s, miles. Parks—when I retired we were at 40 something or other, and I think we're probably pushing 50 right now.

Webb: Okay. Tell us about the City swimming pool, the Sand Hollow Aquatic Center, and the history of pools within the Department, Leisure Services Department, or what do they call it, the Parks and Community?

Perkins: Services.

Webb: Community Services Department.

Perkins: So the original City Pool was in Worthen Park, called City Park at that time, and was there for, I don't know how many years. And then in 1974, the City applied for a land and water conservation grant, a federal grant, and they were able to get enough money to be able to build the pool down on 700 South. And a couple of years later, an entrepreneur came to the City and offered to work a deal with the City where they would put in the tube slide. I'm not exactly sure, that was the end of the 70s, I believe. And so the tube slide was instituted down on 700 South. And as you know, it's still there. And over the years there have been a lot of changes in that facility. It's pretty much, I know they've done some upgrading this year. But and then in 1996 the City passed the Parks and Recreation bond. And that's a whole other story. But the bond

became the major funding source for the majority of the big facilities that the City has today. And so the Sand Hollow Aquatic Center was one of the facilities that the public asked for. And so that design took place, and I think we opened, it was either 1999 or 2000, somewhere in that neighborhood when the pool, when the Aquatic Center was opened. The facility was designed by a group out of Denver who have done facilities all over the United States.

Webb: Okay. Describe the St. George sports program and the sports that the City sponsors.

Perkins: Okay. Well, that's always been one of the hallmarks of the Department with youth sports and adult sports. And of course they've expanded it into a number of other kinds of sports. At one time we had the largest soccer program in the whole area, and then private groups came in and started offering soccer, you know, travel teams, etc., etc., and that kind of shrunk the City's soccer program, but it's still there. So it's soccer, baseball, softball, T-ball, volleyball.

Webb: You mentioned tennis, right?

Perkins: Rugby, tennis. Anyway, those are youth programs. Adult programs they have pretty much the same—flag football, futsal, kickball, anything pretty much with balls. The City program's now expanded because of the, initially we built the Tonaquint tennis complex, and then of course, pickleball became the king. So then that became a major thrust, you know, for pickleball throughout the community.

Webb: Including Little Valley?

Perkins: Little Valley, Bloomington, City Downtown. And there were other places around town where it's planned, I know.

Webb: Right. Describe Tonaquint Nature Center and how that appeals to a different set of recreation.

Perkins: Okay. So obviously, as part of the bond, we determined that we not only had to build facilities, but we need to have land to build facilities. And so we entered into a land acquisition program, and we purchased quite a few acres of property for what is now called Tonaquint Park, but also the Tonaquint Cemetery, the Nature Center and Thunder Junction. That was all one big piece of property. And the driving force on that particular site was the Tonaquint Nature Center because it was such a beautiful site, and it was a wetland, etc., etc. So we acquired the property and began to develop the Nature Center. We got a small grant to be able to do that, and built the pond, etc. The Nature Center in and of itself was the idea that we wanted to preserve, that was one of the preservation areas in the community that we thought was significant in nature. I was involved in nature centers back on the East coast, three or four different nature centers that we operated, very popular, very attractive to people who are typically not just sports oriented, but it creates a whole different way of not only preserving a special area but creating programming that allows access to the outdoors, camps, and unique

kinds of settings there. So the Nature Center has become just a really nice thing. The biggest thing that happened negatively to the Nature Center was the big flood back in the 2000s, early 2000s, and a big chunk of the Nature Center actually disappeared thanks to the River taking out a lot. But our Parks people have gone in over the years and reforested that area significantly.

Webb: It's a beautiful, beautiful place, a beautiful area.

Perkins: Yes, it's really nice.

Webb: So tell us about the Zion Square. Not very many people really know about that, but it's kind of a nice little jewel in downtown.

Perkins: Well, it was a function of working with Zion National Bank, and the idea was to create a beautification right in the heart of the City. And so we entered into an agreement with them that we would maintain that if they would make the space available. And so that's what it is, essentially, is a beautiful little thing. And we put a sculpture in there now.

Webb: Okay. Were you the originator of the Recreation, Arts, and Parks Tax that has helped various organizations provide, you know, the various recreation and cultural arts opportunities for City residents?

Perkins: I wasn't the originator, but there were a number of communities in the State of Utah and other places that created RAP taxes. And so there were several of us that talked about it, and this will be an ideal funding source.

Webb: So tell us about the benefits.

Perkins: Well primarily, well, recreation, arts, and parks. And for the first time, the arts was able to receive funding through a taxing program, which is really nice in a sense because the majority of the funds that come through the RAP tax come from sales, and it's one-tenth of one percent or something like that. And so when you think about it, because we're such a tourist-oriented community, then you've got money coming in from, thank people who come here and spend their money for helping us be able to develop our own programs and facilities. And so it's a very small increment of money, but it turns out to be a really large benefit for creating recreation, but primarily for facilities on the recreation and parks side. But then on the arts side, it creates an opportunity for us to support the arts in the community. And so the cultural arts get a real bang for that buck.

Webb: Okay. Tell us about the other City-sponsored events such as the St. George Arts Festival, and what involvement have you had in that particular event, and maybe any others.

Perkins: Well, the Arts Festival was two years old when I moved to St. George. And the first year it was held at the Ancestor Square. And then the next year it moved to the street, on Main Street. So for a number of years we were on Main Street, and we grew from one block to two blocks, and then it became too big. And so that's when Town Square was built. And so once Town Square was ready for us, we moved into Town Square.

Webb: And you've had plenty of room and lots of booth patrons. I was just blown away. I mean I spent, oh, probably a good hour going through almost every one of the booths [on several rows], and I still didn't get through all of them.

Perkins: Well, it was well into the 180s, something like that, booths. For years it was about 110. But it's bigger now. But you know, there are thousands and thousands of people who come to the City for the Art Festival, and it's been a great joy to see it grow, and the quality of the artists, etc.

Webb: Are there any other major accomplishments that you feel were made during your tenure as Director of St. George Leisure Services Department?

Perkins: So get out my horn so I can blow it, is that what you're asking me to do? Well, yes, for instance, our trail system is probably one of the ones that I'm most pleased with. Thunder Junction, All-Abilities Park, right at the top, a great opportunity to provide access to people of all abilities, and it's growing, and they're going to add to it this year. Safety Town, a little program we started back in 1982, teaching preschool kids and kindergarten kids about safety in life. It's gone on now for forty-something years. It was harder to get into than the Marathon was for the most part. We converted the old Armory into the Recreation Center, which I think was a real win and has been a real blessing for this community. I think preservation of, we've acquired a lot of land and preserved a lot of land along the rivers, which has been another thing that we really have been really pleased with. We've built, and we're in a beautiful museum, art museum. And that whole renovation of that square up there, you know, there were a lot of people involved in that process. But being able to have a museum over the years, it's a beautiful facility. I just happen to make a note, when you asked that question, I thought, you know, the Critical Areas Plan, I think, is one of the best things. And then, of course, the bond election of '96 which, thankfully, has been renewed now. But that bond election brought the canyon complex, softball complex, the tennis courts, the aquatic center, the recreation center second phase, the skateboard park, and half a dozen neighborhood parks, and a lot of trails, so it was really a great blessing. The last one that I'll tell you, though, is in 2015 our department was recognized as the outstanding department in the United States. [Added by Perkins after the interview: Two exciting projects that we accomplished, unique to our community, were the Seegmiller Historical Farm and the renovation and development of the Electric Theatre Complex. One of our long-term projects was the restoration and renovation of the Dixie Academy Building.]

Webb: Wow. That's so amazing.

Perkins: They called it the Gold Medal Award by our National Parks and Recreation Association. We were pretty happy about that.

Webb: Yeah, that's awesome. What other civic or religious organizations have you participated in, if any?

Perkins: Well, with the LDS Church, I've been involved in a lot of things there, notably though, Special Needs Mutual. Have you ever heard of Special Needs Mutual?

Webb: No, but it sounds really neat.

Perkins: Well, eventually we had 23 stakes or units feeding kids with special needs into this program, and it started out quite small, and before the end of the first year we had over a hundred and something individuals participating. And at the end of the first year it was so big that we had to split, and we split from Washington and Hurricane and two on the other side of town, and so that program has grown from one program to five programs and probably four or five hundred participants, every Thursday for years now. And I think that's one of my favorite all-time things. I've also been involved with the Virgin River Land Preservation Association, which is an organization that I helped found which is a land preservation group. I haven't been actively involved with it for a number of years, but I'm back now involved with it. But those individuals have helped preserve millions of acres and thousands of acres of property, which is really great for the community. I was also involved with the St. George Live History program that Doug Alder created.

Webb: Yes, I remember.

Perkins: And where we dressed up like individuals, and I was one of the Pratt brothers, Orson Pratt, and welcomed people to historic buildings downtown, which was a lot of fun.

Webb: That is a lot of fun.

Perkins: That was a great organization. I mean it goes on and on, and the World Senior Games.

Webb: And the World Senior Games, too.

Perkins: Yes, and I've directed the road races in the Senior Games. That's part of it.

Webb: That's awesome. Where and when were you born?

Perkins: I was born in Ogden, Utah, in 1948.

Webb: Okay. And who else was in your family?

Perkins: At the time, Mom and Dad.

Webb: Okay. You were the oldest. You were the oldest? No other children.

Perkins: No. Oh, I had two siblings.

Webb: Were you the oldest?

Perkins: Two siblings brothers and a sister.

Webb: Okay. But were you the oldest?

Perkins: I was the oldest.

Webb: You were the oldest.

Perkins: I still am the oldest.

Webb: What did your community look like outside your family?

Perkins: Community?

Webb: Your community. What did Ogden look like when you grew up? What was it like?

Perkins: I don't know. I was young. My family moved to, I actually lived in Layton. I lived in a World War II housing development for all those returning GIs. And we lived there for a few years then moved to Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Webb: Where did your ancestors come from?

Perkins: Over the pond. So I have from England and a little bit of Germany, Scotland, a little Ireland, for the most part.

Webb: Where did you first settle?

Perkins: They or me?

Webb: Where did they first settle, excuse me.

Perkins: So I have a number of ancestors who were in Plymouth Colony, came over on the Mayflower. Tennessee, Maryland. I have, the Perkins ancestor was an indentured servant who came over to Maryland, and from Maryland they went to North Carolina and South Carolina and Tennessee and then over to Illinois. On the Gattis side we're from Tennessee and that area and Colorado.

Webb: So describe your grammar school and your high school years.

Perkins: I was small.

Webb: You were small? So where did you go, what school did you attend?

Perkins: Cheyenne, Wyoming. I went to two different elementary schools and junior high and high school, Cheyenne East High School.

Webb: Oh, my gosh. Okay. Did you have any interests in your school days? Did anything stand out at that time?

Perkins: It was really boring. I didn't have—

Webb: No sports?

Perkins: I was an art guy, I was in art and every sport that came down. In my neighborhood, I was known as the guy in charge because I had, I organized a neighborhood football team and a baseball team and a basketball team, and we didn't really have a Parks and Recreation Department, so our neighborhood played each other. And so I was in charge of that. I organized a track meet, had a sports equipment lending service. I created a neighborhood newsletter. I did all those things as a neighborhood kind of a guy back in the day. So that's what I—organized the parties when I got older.

Webb: Wow. What influential teachers did you have? Any one that stood out?

Perkins: Mr. Bittinger. He was the history teacher. I enjoyed history, so he was really influential in my early days.

Webb: What were your hobbies and interests as a child?

Perkins: Rocks.

Webb: Rocks.

Perkins: Indian artifacts, arrowheads and whatever, sports. I was sports—I can tell you the names of every starting lineup on baseball back at one time. So I was really into sports.

Webb: Did you collect baseball cards?

Perkins: Absolutely.

Webb: Any favorites?

Perkins: All of them.

Webb: Education-wise—

Perkins: I once had 300 doubles, and I traded them for a turtle.

Webb: Wow.

Perkins: The turtle ran away the next day, and I lost my cards and my turtle.

Webb: Oh no. Education-wise, did you attend college or university, and what was your major and minor?

Perkins: I went to BYU [Brigham Young University]. I was an art major for two years, graduated with a degree in broadcasting, communications.

Webb: What year?

Perkins: In '73, I think it was. And in '74 I went back to school and I got a masters degree in recreation education and administration.

Webb: How did you decide to go there?

Perkins: Where?

Webb: To BYU. What made you decide to go to BYU?

Perkins: I was actually accepted at Weber State, and I don't know why I didn't apply for BYU. But I had a friend who came back from BYU and touted how great it was, so I decided to apply, and miraculously they let me in. And they wouldn't today, with my grades, but miraculously I got in.

Webb: Did you have any influential mentors there at BYU?

Perkins: Yes.

Webb: Any that stand out?

Perkins: A lot of them. But the people who were in charge of the advertising program were extraordinary. Their classes were very hard, and I learned that being in a hard class was not a bad thing, and it stretched you, and it actually, you can learn at a higher rate.

Webb: That's true.

Perkins: Then when I went into the masters program, John Hansen was one of the professors, and he was down to earth, really good guy, and he was really a powerful influence on me. But Gary Palmer, who was a professor there, was really powerful, and one of the reasons why I was on the East Coast to work was because Gary Palmer had said that when he graduated from the University he didn't have any job offers except for one in I think it was in Illinois and one in North Carolina. So he packed up his family, and he drove to those two to assess them and ended up in North Carolina or something. So at

the time I graduated there were slim pickings, and my wife and I looked and called—my phone bill was extraordinary back then—called every major city west of Denver, Colorado, to the coast, and couldn't find anything that was even offered, and so I packed up my family, put them in the car, and drove east and stopped at every major city on Highway 80 all the way across, and walked in and asked people for employment. We got to New Jersey, my wife's family lived in New Jersey. I went up and down the coast. I even drove 300 miles for a part-time interview, didn't get it. But eventually I started working in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and then in Delaware, and then we came back to the west.

Webb: So describe how you met and married your spouse.

Perkins: She lived right next door to me at BYU.

Webb: What's her name?

Perkins: Her name is Lynn.

Webb: Last name?

Perkins: She was a Haycock. And she and I were in what they called a BYU family group, family home evening group together. And that's where we met. And we got married a year after, a little over a year and a half after I met her, I guess, married her in Salt Lake City, the Salt Lake LDS Temple.

Webb: Describe any important aspects of your family life and raising your children. Do you have children?

Perkins: You don't have that much time. I have five boys and one girl.

Webb: Any grandchildren?

Perkins: Nineteen.

Webb: Any great-grandchildren?

Perkins: None.

Webb: None. Okay.

Perkins: My kids are scattered all over. I have a son who works for Disney down in California. I have a son who is in Nevada. I have a son who works for Meta, Facebook, in Utah County. I have a son who is the chief of staff for the Alpine School District. I have a daughter who lives in Mapleton, and I have a son who lives here.

Webb: A son who lives here. So you've got one child that lives here that you can go see on a regular basis. As you look back over your life, what would you like to be remembered for?

Perkins: Well, that's an excellent question. You knew that was an excellent question because it would take me forever to come up with an answer. I always want to think that we raised a good family and that they're God fearing, that they contribute to their communities, that they're good people. Obviously that would be right at the top. I want to, I really think it's important that we recognize that there is no greatness without goodness in this life, and to be great, to be good, basically, is to be the best you can be. And so if you're kind and generous and helpful and supportive and those kinds of things, that certainly would be something to be remembered for. And so I think there's been a lot of good done in the community, and I've been pleased to have been a part of a lot of that goodness, and I hope that, you know, there are some things that we've done that are really good, you know, with the Department. There's more to it than just, you know, I'm happy with what we've left St. George. I think that my goal was to do my best to help St. George be better than when I got there, to contribute in some way and to be a contributor. So I feel like we've been a contributor to help make the community something special. There are those who would yell at me and say, "You're the reason why there's too much traffic because the things you created or help create brought too many people to St. George." I've heard that, believe it or not. Well, I didn't create anything, but I was a part of the process that helped make some wonderful things happen in St. George. So I think, you know, some have said that I kind of have been a visionary. Well, maybe I have, you know. And it hasn't stopped with retirement, you know. I can see lots of things that are good. But besides seeing what's good in the community, you know, you hope you can see what's good in people.

Webb: Yeah. And I think many people would see you as a true visionary for seeing what this City could become, you know, with all the many offerings that it has, that it has become a destination community. Is there anything else that you feel is important that I haven't asked you?

Perkins: It's good to see you. I'm glad I still recognize you from the time when you were just a little nipper working at *The Spectrum*.

Webb: It's really good to see you. I've always admired you, and yeah, I, you know, as a reporter I got to come in contact with you often, you know. And I've always had a great deal of respect for you. At this time—

Perkins: I have one more thing to tell you that I'm proud of.

Webb: Okay.

Perkins: I have great taste in wives.

Webb: Okay.

Perkins: She's an extraordinary lady, and so I want to be remembered for my good taste.

Webb: Thank you. So we want to thank all of you for joining in with us for this oral history interview. We want to, at this point we want to thank the community education channel studios. We want to thank Lauren Golden and her staff for providing this service, and we look forward to [you] joining with us again the next time we have an interview. This is our nineteenth oral history interview that I have been involved with. So I am really grateful for that opportunity. And until we see you again, thank you so much.