

Sue Stout Cox Interview
Interviewed by Loren Webb

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Participants: Loren Webb (Interviewer)
Sue Stout Cox (Interviewee)

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Transcribed by: Susan Mower

Webb: Welcome, everyone. My name is Loren Webb. I'm with the Washington County Historical Society. Today I am interviewing Sue Cox. Sue is a lifelong resident of St. George, and I'm just excited to be able to interview her about her life. So what I'd like to start with is Sue, just tell us a little about—well, first of all, tell us your full name.

Cox: Sue Cox [Martha Sue Stout Cox].

Webb: And where and when were you born?

Cox: Do you know what, I was actually born in Cedar City in December of 1948.

Webb: Who else was in your family?

Cox: At the time, I was child number 5, so we added after I was born three more.

Webb: What were your parents' names?

Cox: Elton Stout, my father; Verlyn Wood Stout, my mother.

Webb: Did other family members live nearby?

Cox: Honestly, at that point we lived in Kanarrville. That's why I was born in Cedar City. So my parents were both originally from Hurricane, so I would say there were people nearby that were related, but nobody really in that particular community. And when I was five years old we moved to Las Vegas.

Webb: Where did your parents meet? How did they meet?

Cox: You know what, it would have just been in high school, whatever, in Hurricane.

Webb: What did your community look like outside of your family, living in Kanarrville? What was that like?

Cox: I left there when I was 5, so I don't know. My community was my home. I had a brother, the oldest in our family. His name was Johnny, and he had spina bifida, and so we were always dealing with his adjustments to life. And in fact, that's why we moved to Las Vegas. They were opening up a special needs school. My father took his construction company and we planted ourselves in that area. And I lived there until I graduated from high school.

Webb: Where in Las Vegas did you live or grow up?

Cox: It was at the time called North Las Vegas, so now when you say North Las Vegas they really, I think that frame of reference is a whole new area. Where I grew up was really kind of right, it's right off what they call Civic Center Drive. It was great and a great place to grow up.

Webb: Describe your grammar school and your high school years. Where did you attend your elementary and junior high and high school.

Cox: Well, you know, they were all right there in Las Vegas. My junior high was just kind of across the street from where I lived for many years, and then we built a home, and that changed. The high school I went to was Rancho High School. And Rancho High School was like probably considered the most volatile of any of the high schools in Las Vegas. During my high school years we would stay inside of a classroom for lunch because there were usually riots in the lunch room. Sounds crazy, but growing up in Las Vegas was great, actually, because I had great friends that were all nationalities, good friends that were blacks and friends that were Mexican. We had quite a melting pot.

Webb: It sounds like it. What were your hobbies and interests as a child? Anything that stands out?

Cox: Goodness, that's interesting. Well, I honestly have to say probably music and theater were probably loves of mine from the time I was old enough to do either one of them. So I participated in a lot of theater, even in junior high, high school. I came here to go to Dixie as a freshman.

Webb: Dixie College?

Cox: Dixie College at the time, and, of course, you're just getting your generals, but I did a lot of things. I worked with Marion Bentley. I worked some in student government and church sorority. It was awesome.

Webb: What was it about theater that appealed to you, theater and music?

Cox: Yeah. I imagine it's just a unique way to communicate and express yourself. I liked the story-telling aspect of theater. I liked the good that it can do, the meaningful part. Music has always been inherently a part of my life.

Webb: Did you play any instruments?

Cox: I did. I played the clarinet in school. I played the piano, never like very well, not well enough to really even tell you that I played the piano. But yeah, musical theater was always a love of mine.

Webb: When you went to, you say, of course, you attended Dixie College. Do you remember what years you attended Dixie College?

Cox: Uh-huh. I came in the fall of '67 and graduated in '69.

Webb: Did you graduate with an associate's degree at that time?

Cox: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Webb: You mentioned Marion Bentley. Were there any other influential mentors?

Cox: You know what, I think there were significant instructors at Dixie. I mean you've got Andrew Barnum who was class-act amazing, that he should land here.

Webb: Like a world-class scientist.

Cox: That's right, absolutely. Donna Parkinson, I did a lot of sewing and child-development type stuff while I was here, weaving. It was fun. And she was an integral part of a lot of what I consider my best education here.

Webb: I understand you served an LDS mission.

Cox: I did.

Webb: Where did you serve, and what years did you serve, and what did you learn from your mission?

Cox: So I left in June of 1972, returned in December of '73, and I served in Peru. At the time, Peru was all one mission. I don't know how many it is now, like 12 or something. It was great. It was a really awesome experience. But before I went, I graduated from BYU.

Webb: Okay, so you went to Dixie College, graduated with your associate's, and then went to BYU?

Cox: And then went to BYU.

Webb: Did you graduate with a bachelor's there?

Cox: Uh-huh, I did, yeah.

Webb: In what field?

Cox: In elementary ed[ucation].

Webb: And then you went on your mission?

Cox: Yes.

Webb: Okay.

Cox: I left just a couple of weeks after I graduated.

Webb: What made you decide to go on a mission?

Cox: You know, I think for a girl, the motivation to go on a mission emanates from a feeling that it's something you're supposed to do, and I had that feeling for many years. So I just knew that one day I would serve.

Webb: My wife and I have been to Peru, and we love Peru. It's an amazing area.

Cox: Right, it's awesome, it is.

Webb: Describe how you met your husband Mervyn Cox and when you married.

Cox: Well, I had returned from my mission, and my parents, who had previously lived in Las Vegas, about the time, actually, that I went up to Provo to go to BYU, they relocated to St. George. Of course they were both southern Utah-ites, so that was kind of a natural place for them to come. And as you know, my younger siblings were still in school, but they moved into what was called the St. George Third Ward. So I left on my mission from that ward, and when I returned, my husband was in that ward. He was probably in the ward when I left, but I didn't know him. When I came home, he was divorced with four children, and I was heading off to California to teach in a bilingual school. That was kind of my trajectory. Then we got lined up to see each other, and so we went out on a date, and, well, the rest was history.

Webb: That is so neat!

Cox: Yeah.

Webb: And the Third Ward. I mean that's one of the original wards in the St. George Stake.

Cox: For sure, for sure.

Webb: And it's basically around the Red Hill, would you say?

Cox: Uh-huh, yep.

Webb: Describe any children, grandchildren, or great-grandchildren.

Cox: Well, okay. So when I married my husband he had four children. They were ages, when I met him, Jody, the youngest, was 3. The oldest, Dan, was 9. And they had each advanced a year by the time we married. But we then added to our family. I had 8 additional children, so we've got 12 kids. I just barely was in Lehi helping with my youngest son's new baby, and that was number 58 grandchild.

Webb: Oh, my gosh. That's so wonderful.

Cox: That was awesome.

Webb: If you worked, where did you work, and what were your duties? Did you work during that time, or were you pretty much raising family?

Cox: Do you know what, it's interesting, because when I came to Dixie College, you know, I had a couple of jobs. I worked with T. LaVoy Esplin in the School District.

Webb: Washington County School District.

Cox: Yes, that was just a day job for me. I waitressed at what was then called the Jolly King Restaurant, which was great. It was a great meeting place for a lot of people whose relationships I have cherished through the years.

Webb: Yes. It was approximately between 500 and 600 East St. George Boulevard, on the south side.

Cox: Yes, it was.

Webb: It was a very popular spot.

Cox: Absolutely. Yes, so we had a lot of the old regulars that I got to know, and it was fun. So I worked there during some summer months, but I also stayed one year and worked through the fall to earn money for my mission.

Webb: What was your husband's occupation, and what experiences did you and your family have in relation to that occupation?

Cox: Well, my husband was an orthodontist, so he had a very thriving practice at the time I met him, and he had been separated, basically divorced, for about a year when I returned from my mission. So I met him within two months of returning, and then I never went to California. I just stayed here.

Webb: And he had a very successful orthodontic practice.

Cox: And yeah, he was a very well respected orthodontist, but also very much an entrepreneur. So he did a lot of land investments, he did business investments, he was, you know, it was great. He was one of the original investors with Sky West Airlines and sat on their Board for basically all of our married life.

Webb: And he had a farm, as well, right?

Cox: Well, yes, kind of a gentleman's farm. But he was raised on a dairy farm, so—

Webb: Right, Boots Cox Dairy.

Cox: Boots Cox Dairy.

Webb: Very famous. So tell me about your, well, first of all, was there any other religious organizations that you participated in, any other callings besides your LDS mission?

Cox: Oh, yeah, through the years, I think everything, you know, some stake callings, Young Women's President, Relief Society President, counselors, Gospel Doctrine Teacher, yeah, many calls through the years.

Webb: Yes. So tell me about your service with the Dixie College and/or Dixie State College and possible Dixie State University. Apparently you served on the Advisory Board?

Cox: Right.

Webb: Tell me approximate years that you served and what were your duties and responsibilities?

Cox: Okay. So to think of when I started with the Advisory Board, it was probably in the, I can't remember for sure.

Webb: It's okay.

Cox: But probably in the late '90s I started, and on through 2001 or 2002 as they reorganized, a long time.

Webb: So it was Dixie College up until, Dixie College until 2000, and then Dixie State College.

Cox: It was Dixie College, and then it—right, yes.

Webb: So tell me about your duties and responsibilities.

Cox: Well, you know what, it varied with the University President. Some got the Advisory Board more involved than others [unclear] tended to try to integrate the Advisory Board with committees and so on and so forth. But we would meet twice a year, and there would be kind of a cooperative kind of brainstorming, trying to evaluate what's going

right, what needs help, and all of those things. It was during that time that they brought the Innovation Center, you know, we had a lot of emphasis with just different departments, and they tried to use the Advisory Board as resource to try to enhance what was going on on campus. That was the guide.

Webb: Did you set, did the Advisory Board set policy?

Cox: No, I don't think so. I think that's the Board of Trustees, yes.

Webb: Approximately 2018, 2019, the University changed its name from Dixie State University to Utah Tech University. [It was actually July 1, 2022.]

Cox: Right.

Webb: Do you think the name change from Dixie to Utah Tech was justified? Explain.

Cox: You know, personally, I don't. And I was opposed because I felt like there was a bowing to the woke movement that was happening in our nation. And I felt like that was orchestrated and we kind of fell into a manipulation there.

Webb: I understand you developed 605 Place student housing and code living located at 605 East Tabernacle. How did that development come about, and how does that benefit Utah Tech University?

Cox: Well, I think it benefits them greatly because they have to have quality housing, so I owned a portion of that land. It was a little strip mall. I still own a motel that's on the corner, and a car dealership, the land where the car dealership is. But it was a combined effort with land that had been really given to Dixie College, if I'm, you know, thinking right about it. We hired a group called PAG to come down and basically commandeer the development of 605 Place. I think they did an excellent job, and we were, you know, involved with that. I think it's a great benefit to the University. It helps them.

Webb: How many students are in the housing, approximately?

Cox: Oh, my gosh, you know what, Loren, I can't even tell you. I can't tell you how many beds there are. But it's a very unique design.

Webb: It's such a beautiful—it really is.

Cox: And they've created a space so that basically every bedroom has its own bathroom. The common area spaces are just very well fit for that age group, and it's been good.

Webb: It's located right there, like a block off of campus.

Cox: Right.

Webb: So it's very convenient for the students.

Cox: Exactly.

Webb: I understand that you were named to the Utah Tech University Hall of Fame in 2014 for Fine and Performing Arts. How do you think that honor came about, and what does that recognition mean to you?

Cox: Well, of course I feel very honored that they would recognize me in that capacity. It was kind of on the heels of my husband being honored, you know, several years before. And I was pleased with kind of the little niche that they gave me with that, honoring the performing arts. So I felt great. It was an awesome thing.

Webb: That was pretty neat to see that happen. How did you become involved with the Tuacahn Center for the Arts Board, and what years have you served on the Board?

Cox: Well, okay. So I've really been there from the beginning. When Doug Stewart was first, you know, planning an amphitheatre for that space, my husband and I went out there with Doug and kind of walked that area.

Webb: Can you describe the location, because it's just a standout, gorgeous—

Cox: It's called Padre Canyon, and of course you kind of go into that community of Ivins and kind of neighbors to Snow Canyon. There's just a private little road that goes up into this secluded little sweet canyon, very majestic. It had previously, I think, been appreciated mostly by the Hafen family.

Webb: Orval Hafen had a home up there, didn't he?

Cox: He did. They had a cabin.

Webb: Right.

Cox: I think at the time that Doug Stewart came that the Hafen family, I believe Ruth Hafen, had sold it to someone else, but it was very significant in their family's life. Orval Hafen actually died there in that Tuacahn Canyon.

Webb: While working to develop some kind a project related to that.

Cox: Right. I don't know how much of a visionary he was for what has ultimately, has become Tuacahn as we know it, but I think he envisioned millions of people coming to that area and appreciating that beautiful setting.

Webb: Yes, the setting is just incredible. It's a one-of-a-kind setting.

Cox: Yes.

Webb: So tell me a little about the vision of Doug Stewart and the original Board that you served on. What was the vision there? What did they want to do?

Cox: So Doug's dream was to do a production, a musical production, that would be indigenous to Utah, to our setting. He chose the Jacob Hamblin story as kind of the core story, and he worked with a few people to write a script. And his dream was to do something that is done in a few places in the United States. The one place that I remember him talking about the most was in Texas, so apparently they have a show down there called *Texas*, and people come from far and wide every year. It's an outdoor setting, and it has just grown its own wings.

Webb: And he called it Utah, right?

Cox: Yes, he called the production *Utah*. And like I said, it was the story of the early settling of southern Utah.

Webb: And then it expanded into more Disney related?

Cox: So this is what happened. Basically *Utah* played for a few years. There was a major rewrite of the script. But I think ultimately people in St. George had seen it. It didn't have, maybe, the draw that was hoped for the Wasatch Front to make the journey to St. George in the heat of the summer to watch this production. And it had been basically funded by Hyrum Smith. There had been many donors, smaller donors. But Hyrum had donated in this time which, of course, now has multiples of the number I'm going to say, just because of the value of the dollar. But he donated \$13 million. Well, I said that wrong. He donated ten. He donated \$10 million, no strings attached. It was just a, you know, he was a good friend of Doug Stewart's. They had served, in fact, Hyrum, his wife Gail, and also Doug had served in England under Marion D. Hanks as missionaries [for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints]. So they knew each other. Hyrum had been finally convinced that he was healthy enough financially to be able to fulfill Gail's dream of returning to her home in southern Utah. So they had moved here just at the time that Doug was trying to grow his dream. And so Gail and Hyrum, with their what we like to call abundance mentality, got involved. Right off, they donated \$10 million and helped him kind of get things really going. And then Hyrum opened up the line of credit to this group with their noble and lofty dreams. And they ate into that an additional \$13 million. So there was a huge investment on the part of Hyrum. So when this project didn't quite take off, there had been a lot of money invested, not only in the development of the amphitheater, but also buildings. And the buildings were built basically like to house a music school. Doug Stewart's wife Mary, her father, I think, was an orchestra teacher. Their children were all very talented and well educated in string instruments. And her dream was to create this outstanding music school. But none of that quite came together, which happens all the time with developments. So when the project for *Utah* was not working, they actually stepped away; Mary and Doug Stewart stepped away. And Hyrum found himself with the bones of what would have been a

school, a music school and a theater, in quite an unfamiliar world. So Hyrum wisely, I think very wisely, reached out to the community and said, you know, “I’m needing help. We need to try to make something of this.” The question was, do we mothball it, walk away, you know, lick our wounds and, you know. Or do we try something else? And Hyrum, of course, was a bigger-than-life personality, and he was, you know, very resourceful, and he always said something to the effect, “I hate asking people for money, but I’m just so good at it.” Which was like, honestly, the greatest blessing for Tuacahn was that he was able to tap, you know, acquaintances of his and significant individuals who could just give enough to help keep it afloat.

Webb: When did they start focusing on the Disney-related theatrical productions?

Cox: So I’ll tell you that story. Well, the thing that happened—

Webb: And one other thing is, you’re all a part of this, too. You’re witnessing this first-hand on the Board, too.

Cox: Oh yes, that was, we were all in there with all fours, just trying to fulfill a mission that we felt Tuacahn was ultimately meant to fulfill. So first of all, it had, there were two efforts going on. I mean we had all the buildings. Hyrum had become a good friend with Gerald Sherratt who was, of course, President at SUU.

Webb: Southern Utah University.

Cox: And so Gerald came down for a while, tried to help kind of see what could be done with that portion of the Tuacahn package, and it was kind of during that period that they decided to start a school. So they started the Tuacahn High School that would kind of keep those buildings warm, give them purpose, and see what could happen. So there was a great effort. It was the first charter school in the State of Utah, and it had some amazing people that helped to work those years that it was a school. And then on the theatrical side we had actually approached the Eccles Foundation for some funding to kind of help us, and the information really that had been presented to the Eccles was we think that maybe we will try some Broadway shows and see what can happen. And it was really a grant that was offered by the Eccles Foundation, and they always do last moneys in. That is just their moderm. But they said to us as a group that we will give you \$350,000 at the end, if you try to bring Broadway to that stage. So we did. We ventured.

Webb: And it became very successful.

Cox: It didn’t become immediately successful. It was a real challenge. I mean it was almost a 2,000-seat capacity, and we’re trying shows that were, the productions were always good, you know. We had some fine people. The first years we leaned heavily on the BYU [Brigham Young University] people, Rodger Sorenson, Tim Threlfall, you know, Marion Bentley helped the direction of some of those shows. We had a lot of support, but it was financially such a challenge to keep things going. And at one point as a Board we decided that we needed to maybe bring in an artistic director.

Webb: And you had live orchestra at one point, right?

Cox: Oh, yeah.

Webb: I mean live band.

Cox: We've always, we've always had live orchestra.

Webb: Yeah, you've always had that. I loved that. I thought that was just such a plus. People loved that.

Cox: It is, and it's a very under-recognized component of Tuacahn. Because honestly, our orchestra is one of the very best in the nation. At a time when so many people are going to recorded, you know, really because of economics, we've maintained this phenomenal orchestra that has, yeah, it's worthy of comparing any orchestra anywhere.

Webb: And you talked about an artistic director, or what was that?

Cox: Yes. We decided we should bring in an artistic director, so we opened it up for interviews. Hyrum and myself interviewed people from Salt Lake, people from California, New York, and there were some very significant individuals who came in that we were impressed with. But I kept having this feeling that I should bring Scott Anderson who was somebody that I had known from the time Scott came to Dixie College. He was in a production of *Oklahoma* with my sister.

Webb: Do you know that he did the *1776*, which was at Dixie College?

Cox: I did. Absolutely.

Webb: When I was there, it was superb.

Cox: It was.

Webb: It was just so good.

Cox: It was so good.

Webb: Oh, it was so good.

Cox: And that group of young men that Scott performed with in the *1776* [production] was just almost never to be replicated at a junior college. They were phenomenal.

Webb: Yes, and then he did *The Best Two Years*, and that—

Cox: Right. He had done *The Best Two Years* film. I had watched some productions that he had written, actually, at BYU, and my sister had performed, so I was able to sort of track Scott Anderson. And he had been over the Triad Center in Salt Lake. I had taken my family there to watch a production of *Annie* that he had directed. And to watch and understand kind of the theatrical sense that I knew Scott had, I just felt like he was one of these really remarkably gifted individuals, not only in theater itself, but also theater management and just people skills, just working with people.

Webb: And he had a great love of Southern Utah, the Dixie area, right?

Cox: Right, he did. He lived here. His children were all here in St. George. So Scott was living here. So just kind of at the cusp of naming an artistic director, we brought Scott in. And we were several years into Broadway performances on that stage, and we were making headway.

Webb: How was your attendance?

Cox: I mean it was fair.

Webb: Fair.

Cox: It was good enough to keep us from folding, you know, because it's expensive. Of course it's expensive to run a theater with those demographics. We're a fixed stage, the sound, the stage, the lighting, all of it. It's a little overwhelming.

Webb: Were the actors paid or nonpaid, or was there part of both?

Cox: We started the equity actors, I think, early on. We did pay, but it was quite nominally, and it might have been for people coming in from a long distance. But we still had responsibility for housing and a lot of things like that. But when we entered the professional realm, which we were doing somewhat, but when Scott actually was hired to be the Artistic Director, then everything was on steroids. It was a delight to watch the evolution.

Webb: The attendance took off, Tuacahn—

Cox: This is kind of the store. So let me ease into it.

Webb: I just love hearing this story.

Cox: So the thing that happened, we hired Scott, and he was so able to work with our professionals that came from New York. He was able to kind of speak a common language, garner their respect, work with these seasoned actors that started coming, and created a kind of a new premise of theater at Tuacahn. It was like one of the delights of our existence to have been awarded *Les Mis*. So we did *Les Mis*.

Webb: And that was huge.

Cox: That was huge.

Webb: That was huge.

Cox: Yes, yes.

Webb: And you did *Phantom of the Opera*.

Cox: No, no, no. *Phantom of the Opera* has never been done by a regional theater.

Webb: Okay.

Cox: One day we hope we'll get *Phantom*.

Webb: But you did *Les Mis*. That's huge.

Cox: Yes, but we did *Les Mis*. And it was early on, after they had closed it on Broadway. There had been a few theaters that had done it, but we did it. We have a long season. We start, at that point we started in June and we go through October. And with a show as appropriate for our audience as *Les Mis* is, we were able to bring more revenue to that royalty house than any other group in the United States.

Webb: That's incredible.

Cox: So we created this amazing record to begin with. And ultimately it was that record that we created with *Les Mis* that catapulted us to be able to establish this amazing relationship with Disney. So what happened, basically, Scott had his eye on *Tarzan*. *Tarzan* had been produced on Broadway. Phil Collins had written new music for it. Tom Schumacher who was over Disney Theatrical, was so excited, you know, and it bombed. It did not do well on Broadway. I believe personally—

Webb: *Tarzan* bombed on Broadway, wow.

Cox: It did. I believe it was because they made it too technical and lost some of that deep heart of it that you really need in that production. And it closed, so there was Disney licking its wounds with that failed production. It had gone over to Europe. It was playing, actually, in Holland, which is where Scott had served his mission. So he was familiar there and familiar with their language. And it was playing in Germany. And it was successful in those arenas. And at the time, Disney was not too sure what they wanted to do with this. They were shy to just let it out to some group. So Scott took the record to them of our success with *Les Mis*. And he convinced them that they should let us try that production in our setting.

Webb: Was he asking for any kind of revisions, or anything, any changes?

Cox: You know what, yes, oh yes. I think it was work shopped, definitely, by Scott. And Scott has such a great sense of what works in theater. That's always a blessing, too, I don't care who you are, Disney or anyone.

Webb: Right.

Cox: So yes, he did. So he did. Scott directed it. It was amazing, an amazing production, very unique.

Webb: I remember going to it, and we loved it. Every show I went to, I loved, frankly, I think.

Cox: Absolutely. And it is the truth, yes, it is living up to a standard that is just—

Webb: Yes, it is living up to that standard.

Cox: So when they did that production—

Webb: Before we get, you've got to tell me about the, talk about the water feature.

Cox: Oh, yes. Well, you know what, it's interesting because—

Webb: But let's go back to the—

Cox: Yes, let's go back to this, and then I'll talk about the water feature.

Webb: I just don't want to forget about the water feature.

Cox: Exactly. So he actually produced this amazing show. We were able to bring Tarzan in from the Canyon which was just so amazing and effective, and we had just a cast that brought the heart and soul to that story. So it was very popular, very well accepted. I believe it was in August when Disney Theatrical and their group came out, which they do come every year, but that particular year they were very anxious to see what had happened with their baby. And it honestly had been such a personal venture for Tom Shumacher that he actually cried when he saw what we had done with *Tarzan*. And from that point on, we have just had an amazing relationship with Disney. So when they bring out a new show, they'll give it to Tuacahn first. They'll do, you know, we did Aladdin before it went to Broadway. That was an awesome thing to be able to do that. And so, all of the shows that we are able to garner from that relationship bless us very much.

Webb: What kind of personal satisfaction do you get from being a part of all of this?

Cox: Oh, goodness, it is tremendous. I feel just so, so blessed to have been able to have been a part of Tuacahn, and I feel like to watch the kind of progress of the quality of production that we do and the ability we've had to kind of hone the content and messaging of the productions to be true to what we consider a very sacred mission.

Webb: Tell me a little bit about the water feature that you can see right, you know, it's like these floods. And then I also want to talk about the water that's big, like, I don't know how to describe it, but I love it after the show, they turn the water on, and it goes all the way down. It's like this big long canal, and it's so calming and such a neat, I don't know, it's a neat aspect.

Cox: I'm glad you're asking, Loren, because I believe that for the latter, for the design of the Tuacahn premise, very little is ever talked about that, and great recognition needs to be given. So first let's talk about the water feature.

Webb: Let's talk about the flooding, the flood. It's incredible.

Cox: It's interesting because that was created for the original *Utah* show. The flooding of the Virgin River was a big part of the story of the settling of Southern Utah. So that was engineered and created early on.

Webb: And they did it for the Washington County Water Conservancy District, too, when they made another film, didn't they?

Cox: They probably did.

Webb: I think they did.

Cox: I would imagine they easily could have. But the bones were there with the huge bladder buried in the ground that basically supplies the water for this.

Webb: It's spectacular.

Cox: It's spectacular. It's expensive, though. And this has had to be redone just because of time and wear and maybe needing a kind of refining for engineering.

Webb: Who came up with the idea for the canal, it goes all the way out there.

Cox: Okay, that's, of course separate.

Webb: That's so cool.

Cox: The design work for all of that was done by David Trueblood. David Trueblood—

Webb: Was he an architect?

Cox: He was a landscape architect.

Webb: Landscape architect. Okay.

Cox: David Trueblood was the son of L’Deane Trueblood. They have both passed away now, but L’Deane of course is known for her sculpting. She brought to this community the Art in the City program that we all benefit from.

Webb: Enjoy, yeah.

Cox: And her son David really got the lion share of her artistic talent and took it in the direction of landscape architecture. And he basically created what we see with that, I don’t know if you’d call it a river, or, that water feature that, you know, is in the center of that whole parking lot and everything, and all of that setting as you first drive in to Tuacahn and you see the faux rock that says Tuacahn, and that area. That’s all David Trueblood.

Webb: It’s just amazing when you come in there. Everything kind of is captivating, and then you know, you get the, even the food that you buy is kind of cool, you know—the nuts, and I don’t know. It’s just everything just feeds on to that, and it’s just the atmosphere. The atmosphere is great.

Cox: It is, and a lot of that credit needs to be given to Kevin Smith, who has been the CEO there for so many years. It was after kind of the Doug Stewart thing happened, then Hyrum brought his nephew in, and that was Kevin. And he was just young enough to not listen to everybody who said, “Oh, you can’t do this, and you can’t do that.” And he just did it anyway.

Webb: Right. Is there anything else about Tuacahn that I haven’t asked you.

Cox: I think something about Tuacahn that is noteworthy is the incredible talent that we’ve been able to bring in. I mean we brought in Stephen Schwartz when we did *The Prince of Egypt* five, six years ago. Stephen came thinking he’d spend a few days in St. George. Do you know who Stephen Schwartz is? So Stephen Schwartz has a lot of credits behind his name, but you will probably most recognize *Wicked*. So he wrote *Wicked*. He was, I mean there’s nobody more significant in that world than Stephen Schwartz.

Webb: We loved that production.

Cox: Yes, of course.

Webb: We just didn’t catch the name.

Cox: So Stephen came. He had written the music to *Prince of Egypt*. Of course, it was a production by DreamWorks, and then he came personally and helped us mount that show. Another individual, Frank Wildhorn, he did *Jekyll & Hyde*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, a myriad of musicals, also on Broadway. We did his production of *Count of Monte Cristo*. Frank has spent a lot of time at Tuacahn. He and Scott are like super buddies. They’re both—two loves is theater and football. And they just formed this great partnership. We’ve just had amazing people. And honestly, seasoned, you’re

seasoned theatrical professionals love Tuacahn. And they respect it. We are well known in the theater world nationwide, which you don't necessarily hear about.

Webb: And you've expanded a little bit, too, because in, what is it, October, you have *Thriller*. And we really enjoyed going to *Thriller*.

Cox: Sure, *Thriller* has been a part of Tuacahn for a very long time. Derryl Yeager was one of the early like directors of some of our shows, and he has an Odyssey Dance group that does, yes.

Webb: Yes, it's just a little bit different than the normal Broadway production.

Cox: Right, exactly, yes. We do the concerts, lots of amazing concerts.

Webb: And there are some other things that extend even into, around the Christmas and Thanksgiving time.

Cox: Sure, yes. We do indoor theater at the Hafen, so we've done magnificent productions, like *Beautiful, a Million Dollar Quartet*, and just fantastic productions in our indoor theater. And we do a Christmas show every year. So last year we did *A Christmas Carol*, Alan Menken's version. Next year we'll do *Alf*.

Webb: And all of these just now, again, enhance Tuacahn's reputation.

Cox: Of course. They do. And they enhance life in Southern Utah.

Webb: Yes.

Cox: They do. And we're able to control kind of the level of family-friendly rating, which is very important to us as a group. So we're organized at Tuacahn with an Executive Committee, which is Jonathan Hafen, whose grandfather was Orval Hafen, Hyrum Smith and his daughter, now, with Hyrum's passing, Stacie Shurtliff and myself. And then underneath that we have a regular Board that we sit on, of course, and the mission issue with our Executive Committee is paramount. We guard it with our lives. Everyone that we work with knows that there are lines you don't cross. Last year we were able to do *Jersey Boys*, which was the last thing in the world we thought we would ever do. But we worked with Aaron.

Webb: Weren't there some language issues with *Jersey Boys*?

Cox: Of course. We cleaned that, they cleaned that for us. We worked with Aaron De Jesus who actually had been on our stage. Now he had been eight years performing Frankie Valli on Broadway with *Jersey Boys*. So he came out and directed the show. And we went through that script with a fine-tooth comb. And we just took out innuendos and language and—

Webb: I think you did an excellent job with *Mama Mia!* too.

Cox: Sure, absolutely.

Webb: I saw *Mama Mia!* in Las Vegas, and were not as impressed with the *Mama Mia!* Production in Las Vegas as we were with Tuacahn.

Cox: Absolutely.

Webb: Isn't that interesting.

Cox: There are a few tricky ones.

Webb: So Tuacahn High School left, right?

Cox: Yes, they did. We gave them all of their funding. We let them take all of their equipment and go do their own thing. So they have [unclear].

Webb: I understand you also served on the Shakespearean Festival Board.

Cox: Yes, I did.

Webb: What years did you serve there, and what experiences stand out?

Cox: I started there probably in the early '90s, well it might even have been the '80s. I was there for many years. I had the great privilege, I served as the Chair of their Board when we received the Tony Award.

Webb: Oh, my gosh!

Cox: So I was able to go back with Fred.

Webb: Fred Adams, the founder.

Cox: Fred Adams and Scott Phillips and—

Webb: The founder of the Shakespearean Festival.

Cox: That's right. We all made this amazing trip back to New York. My husband came with me. We were able to, I was able to go on to the stage of Radio City Music Hall with that group to receive this well-earned award. So yes, Shakespeare has been, yeah, a tremendous experience. And they are a great organization. We are very blessed to have that professional group.

Webb: Yes. I understand that you and your late husband Mervyn Cox set aside Seegmiller Pond and other nearby riparian areas near the Virgin River and the Springs as natural wildlife habitat.

Cox: Uh-huh.

Webb: So how did that come about, and what do you think have been the benefits to the environment and the community?

Cox: Well, I think it was all like wetlands, of course. So you've got your Corps of Engineers, your people that are kind of watching that with kind of a hawk eye, anyway. It was in, goodness, my husband passed away 17½ years ago, so it was maybe thirtyish years ago that attention to that kind of zoning and future of that area was really addressed. And yes, so they did. They decided to preserve it for, at the time they were touting that there were more species of birds that would land in that wetlands area than anywhere, I think, in the western United States.

Webb: Well, it's a special place because Mervyn and you invited me out there. I'll never forget that trip. I got to visit with you and Mervyn, and he showed me. He was so proud and showed me everything about what he was doing with the pond and that area.

Cox: Sure, yes.

Webb: That's a special place. I love that place.

Cox: Yes, it's awesome.

Webb: It's just kind of neat that you did that.

Cox: Sure.

Webb: I understand that you were also involved with developing the Reserve subdivision that's not too far away next to where you reside.

Cox: Yes.

Webb: Can you describe the theme and the purpose, as well as the acre size and the lot sizes of the subdivision and the benefit that it provides to the community of St. George.

Cox: That's an interesting way to pose that question, Loren. We had built our home. We sit on 3½, 4 acres, and we owned all the land. It was farm ground. We raised alfalfa for years. But that had sort of lived its life, and honestly, the impetus for developing the land was twofold. For me, I wanted to preserve the value of my home. I didn't want it to be sold to developers because developers traditionally will come in and make the lots as small as they can because they make more profit with smaller lots, and I wanted homes that would be complementary to the home that we had built. And so that was number

one. But number two was that we owned that land as a family, and I've got twelve kids, and I didn't want twelve kids having to go through the battle of aligning their wills and vision of the future. So I just said, "We're doing it now."

Webb: And it's beautiful. It's one of the most beautiful subdivisions around.

Cox: Thank you.

Webb: I wish there were more subdivisions like that.

Cox: Well, we worked very hard with CC&Rs. I designed the wall that went around it. You know, we commissioned it to be built. We tried to do things that were appropriate to a nicer—so the lot sizes, you asked me. The largest lot size is like an acre and a quarter.

Webb: Okay.

Cox: And there are a few of those. Some are an acre, some are three-quarters of an acre. The smallest is a half acre.

Webb: And you can do some really nice things with those size of lots.

Cox: Yes.

Webb: Have you been involved with developing any other subdivisions or community structures? And if so, can you elaborate on that.

Cox: Well, I have to think about that. We did a lot of development in Pine Valley. We purchased a hundred acres there right after we were married. We did two subdivisions up there. One of them was victimized by this latest fire.

Webb: Oh, my gosh, so with this fire.

Cox: So the fourteen homes that were burned were in the original subdivision we'd created, which is kind of toward the east end. We did an upscale subdivision called Spring Creek Pines.

Webb: That's in Pine Valley area, too?

Cox: That's in Pine Valley, and that was preserved.

Webb: Oh, good.

Cox: And between those two we still have about 40 acres of land that we own. But we've done development. We have some development that we've done in Page [Arizona]. We did improvement of shopping centers. We used to own the shopping center where 605 Place is now. We did go in and redo that after we purchased it eons of time ago. We

used to own the Green Valley Mall. We did a lot of innovation there. It's long since been sold. So yeah, I guess we have.

Webb: I understand you're planning to get married to Jerry Atkin, who is a widower, and also, of course, was previously a CEO of SkyWest Airlines.

Cox: Right.

Webb: How did you meet Jerry, and what are your goals going forward with this extended family?

Cox: Well, it's kind of interesting. Jerry and I met first at Dixie College. He doesn't remember this, but we sat next to each other in a math class taught by Mr. [Ellis] Everett, and so that's when we first got acquainted. Then, of course, I went on to do my things, and Jerry has. But Merv, like I said, was an investor in Sky West. At the time Ralph Atkin was putting a group together, but things didn't go so well with that original effort, so they decided to bring now Jerry to come down, so Jerry came. He was married to Carolyn. Merv served on the board of Sky West, so he worked closely with Jerry for all of those years. And Carolyn and I became very close friends. Carolyn was one of my dearest friends.

Webb: And she passed away.

Cox: She passed away last September.

Webb: Last September.

Cox: Yes, quite young, untimely.

Webb: So young, I'm so sorry. What a great loss.

Cox: Very much so.

Webb: So as you look back over your life, what would you like to be remembered for?

Cox: Oh, my gosh, my family. I just think when it all, push comes to shove, that's your greatest treasure. Family, but I suppose what I feel best about in my community service is just the furthering of the arts. I feel like the arts have such a tremendous impact in the quality of life of any community, and the development of character in it's youth I feel very strongly.

Webb: And if there is anything else that you feel is important that I have not asked you, is there anything that you'd like to mention before we close this interview?

Cox: I feel like we are also blessed to live in this community. I feel that there is an atmosphere here with people that care deeply, have great rooted values. You feel the influence of the,

you know, pioneers who originally settled this area. And I just think the debt of gratitude that we owe to them for the sacrifices they made to create kind of a foundation for us to build an amazing community just cannot be overstated.

Webb: Yes, I would agree with that. Thank you so much, Sue for taking the time to be with us here today. We want to thank all of you for listening in. Again, this interview, oral history interview is sponsored by the Washington County Historical Society. And we want to also thank the Community Education Channel studios for providing these facilities for this interview. And until next time, thank you so much for joining us.

Addendum by Sue Stout Cox

In about 1983, my husband, Mervyn, received a call from Karl Brooks who had been his best friend since grade school. Karl was one of the executive vice-presidents of Dixie College. There was a dilemma that needed to be solved. The college had over-extended in the building of what was then called the Dixie Center. Karl was hoping that Mervyn could help the college preserve ownership of the auditorium as the State had threatened to take it over if the required financial commitments were not fulfilled. He did make a substantial donation, and the building became the MK Cox Auditorium.

Several years later, George Whitehead asked for help to get the Dental Hygiene program at the college off and rolling. We worked for a few years, solidifying that program. At one point, we purchased a motor home converted into a mobile dental office which was used for years to service outlying communities.