

11-16-2003

[John] Gavan Benson : USF 50th (2006) Anniversary Oral History Project: interview by Lucy D. Jones

University of South Florida Libraries. Florida Studies Center. Oral History Program.

John Gavan Benson

Lucy D. Jones

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital.usfsp.edu/university_history_campus_bios

Recommended Citation

University of South Florida Libraries. Florida Studies Center. Oral History Program.; Benson, John Gavan; and Jones, Lucy D., "[John] Gavan Benson : USF 50th (2006) Anniversary Oral History Project: interview by Lucy D. Jones" (2003). *Campus Biographies-All Items*. 29.

https://digital.usfsp.edu/university_history_campus_bios/29

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by the Campus Biographies at Digital USFSP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Campus Biographies-All Items by an authorized administrator of Digital USFSP.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

This Oral History is copyrighted by the University of South Florida Libraries Oral History Program on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the University of South Florida.

**Copyright, 2008, University of South Florida.
All rights, reserved.**

This oral history may be used for research, instruction, and private study under the provisions of the Fair Use. Fair Use is a provision of the United States Copyright Law (United States Code, Title 17, section 107), which allows limited use of copyrighted materials under certain conditions. Fair Use limits the amount of material that may be used.

For all other permissions and requests, contact the UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA LIBRARIES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM at the University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Avenue, LIB 122, Tampa, FL 33620.

USF Florida Studies Center
Oral History Program
USF 50th History Anniversary Project

Narrator: John Gavan Benson (B)
Current Position: Owner, Tavern at Bayboro

Interviewer: Lucy Jones (J)
Location of Interview: Nelson Poynter
Library, St Petersburg
Transcriber: University of Florida
Final Editor: Jared G. Toney

Date of Interview: November 16, 2003
Audit Editor: Danielle E. Riley
Date Audit Edit Completed: June 22, 2004

TRANSCRIPTION

J: Today I'm interviewing Gavan Benson, owner of the Tavern at Bayboro. Good afternoon and thank you for being here.

B: Thank you for having me. Good afternoon.

J: How about we start of explaining what the Tavern is, for those few people who don't know.

B: The Tavern opened in 1981. It's a campus-pub slash sandwich shop slash meeting place for both campus students, administration personnel, and anybody in the surrounding community. We're located very, very close to campus. In fact, if you fall off of our property in any direction you're bound to hit the university somehow. We're surrounded by the university. The university has grown up around us. We're here for all factions.

J: I think a lot of people don't realize that you're not actually part of the university.

B: Definitely, a lot of people. I just had to explain it to somebody fifteen minutes ago who we had in the bar. A lot of people just assume that because of the proximity that we are part of the university. In actuality, no, we're not. We're completely private. The land that we're on is private property. We're completely separate. We have no affiliation

other than proximity. That's really our only affiliation.

J: It's informal, sort of.

B: We do maintain a contract with the university as one of the on-campus caterers. [The] campus has a contract that they maintain with five companies to do on-campus catering and we're one of those five caterers. Other than that, that's our only direct affiliation with the university.

J: Tell me how you got to be involved with the Tavern.

B: [It was] dumb luck. My business partner, who I've known since I was seven, his mother was a real estate broker. She got a listing on a small restaurant in downtown St. Petersburg. We knocked it around, we kidded about how great it would be to have a bar. Two weeks later we owned the place. It was really just dumb luck. We put in a bid just to see how the whole process works on buying a business. We didn't know what we were doing. We hadn't the slightest idea. I was in banking at the time. My partner was then, and still is now, in hotel management. It was just a whim. Much to our surprise, the existing owners said yes. Two weeks later we signed the contract. I went from counting money and dealing with people's banking accounts to making ham sandwiches. I didn't have the slightest idea what I was doing.

J: It's worked out pretty well. That was back in...

B: [It was back in] 1987. 1987 was when we took over the Tavern. The Tavern opened in 1981 and we took over on September 13, 1987. It's been tremendous. My partner is a silent partner. Again, as I said, he's in hotel management. He's the regional manager for a large hotel chain. He's busy, he's out of town four or five days a week every week. Other than, we call and talk and he makes sure that I haven't bankrupted the place or

anything like that, he really has no input with the business or anything. It's pretty much mine to do. For me, it's been wonderful. I've had sixteen going on seventeen fantastic years; getting to meet people down here at the university. It's a very unique situation because we're not your stop-along-the-way restaurant slash bar. Just to throw a number at it, eighty percent of the people who walk into that bar have some sort of a higher education, most of whom have multiple higher educations. It's not your stop-along-the-way. It's a very unique situation. It's been a tremendous opportunity for me.

J: Was it that way when you started there?

B: When we started, the family we bought it from, the couple that owned it, Joan and Carter Carins were their names. My understanding of their situation was [they were] fairly well off. Money wasn't a major concern. [The] wife opened it up as something to keep her busy. [Their] children were getting older, etc. We all know the story. Four or five years into it, they realized that it was a job. They realized it was work. You're open until ten or eleven o'clock at night. There are downsides to owning a bar. [There] are people who take advantage of the alcohol being there occasionally. They realized it was work and they realized it was time to get out. When they owned it and we took it over, we're talking, at the time, an early middle-aged couple handing the keys over to a couple of twenty-four-year-old guys. It was different then than when we took it over. It was truly a sandwich shop that just happened to serve beer. We've gradually changed. The bar has aged with us. When we took it over it was probably more of a bar that happened to serve food for a couple of years. It has aged with us. We've definitely hit a middle ground now, where we do a lot of both, and we do both well, I think. It has changed. It was different when we bought it. It was a little quieter than it is now. I don't want to say we

get ruckuses, that's not the case at all. The music's a little louder than it used to be.

There's a little more beer than there used to be. The kids come in and maybe have a little bit more fun than they used to, seventeen years ago.

J: That's an interesting point, because from the stories I've heard, seventeen years ago, the students were having a good bit of fun on campus.

B: Yeah, on campus. It was funny, because the place where you would have thought they would have been a little more toned down was actually the place where they were having most of the fun. Knowing some of the people you've already spoken to, I'm sure you've heard stories and you can stop me at any point that I'm duplicating stories, but yeah. This campus is still at 4,300 students. It's still small enough where you can walk through the campus and if you've been here for any length of time you do that nod of acknowledgment to half of the people you walk past. You know everybody well enough that you at least acknowledge by the nod thing that we all do. At that time, I think we had maybe 3,600 students; possibly less than that, back in 1987. You knew everybody. You knew everybody by name. You knew when their birthdays were because you went to their party the weekend before for their birthday, including administration, professors, and right on down to the janitors. Everybody knew everybody. Even though there is, at 4,500, there's still a real sense of community down here. It's really got that small-school feel, still. At that time, it might as well have been your elementary school. Everybody knew everybody. The parties here on campus were far better than anything we had over at the pub by any stretch of the imagination. They used to have some wonderful parties out by the pool. They had a spring fling, if I remember the names correctly. They had an end-of-the-summer, I forget what they called it. I think they just called it the summer

bash, or something like that. They always had a spring fling and a summer bash, which were outstanding parties.

J: Were you a student here as well?

B: No, actually, after seventeen years, I just took my first class here. In seventeen years, I could have had at least two Ph.D.'s by now. No, it's ridiculous, and it's just asinine that I never took advantage of the situation that I've been in for all these years. I just took my first class here two semesters ago. I took a French class. [I] bombed it horribly. It's my first college-level class and it's been a while. [It's been] seventeen years, actually. I did not do well in it, but it was a wonderful class and it was actually great to be in a classroom again. I really, really enjoyed it. [I'll] probably be taking some more.

J: Didn't you have a reason for taking French?

B: Yeah, actually, I did. I recently married a long, long-time friend of mine who, my wife's name is Sue, and she lived in France for five years teaching English to [the] French. [She] lived in Marseille, France and she still has *beaucoup* friends over there. We go over every summer. We hope to, fingers crossed, retire there some day. We go over for almost a month every summer. [We] go for three weeks. She usually goes for four weeks. I come back about a week early. After all, I have to work. Actually, I mean that literally. I have to work. That's what I am. The bar is me. I can't be separated for too long. I start to get jittery. [I] feel like Rush Limbaugh, or that is, oxy-contin. We go there every summer and that's why I took the French class. I got tired of my wife having to translate for me all the time and also our French friends speak some or very good English. I got tired of being in their country and them always having to speak to me in my native language. I'm gradually trying to learn.

J: Does Sue work with you at the Tavern?

B: Sue has come in and filled in when I've been stuck or we have a major event. We owned another restaurant close to here by the name of Spanky's for about four months. When she moved back from France, a friend of mine was just opening that restaurant. I got her a job working there. She was working on her master's [degree] at USF. She got a master's in linguistics. While she was working on her master's, she worked there. I took that bar over. My friend had some problems and asked me to take the bar over. My partner and I took over that bar. For a little while we actually did work full-time together. Eh, you know. (laughing)

J: Actually, I do know.

B: It had its high points and it had its low points. For the most part we stayed out of each other's hair. We weren't seeing each other at that time. We were just buddies at that time. We were buddies for a long time before. We finally decided, hey, I kind of like that other guy.

J: Did you grow up in St. Petersburg? It sounds like it since you had known your partner since you were seven.

B: [I was] born in Gainesville, Ohio. [My] father passed away when I was six. We moved here in the summer of 1970. I've been here ever since. [I] moved here when I was seven in the summer of 1970.

J: When you were growing up, when you were here [and you were] younger, did you even know that the University of South Florida was here?

B: No. I had absolutely no idea whatsoever at the time. The university was strictly in the barracks down here; the old Army Air Corps, or Air Force barracks. I don't actually

know what branch of the service they were. I think they were Army Air Corps. They were all down here in the barracks. We used to ride our bikes down to Al Langdon Field all the time for baseball games, or down to the Bayfront Center for concerts. I just never realized they were here. I came to Aunt Hatties, it used to be a very, very popular restaurant. I don't know if anybody had mentioned that to you. Right behind the Tavern, there is a relatively new parking lot. It's only been there for maybe eight or nine years. Previous to that, there was a building there. That was a restaurant by the name of Aunt Hatties. [It was] very, very popular. [It] opened in 1924 by the Boore family. It was operated by their family for many, many, many, many years. I think, until the 1970s, somewhere in there, then they finally sold out. It stayed Aunt Hatties, but some other people bought it. They weren't very successful with it. The Boore family took it back over again. By that time, the damage had been done and they just couldn't make it. In the late 1970s or very early 1980s it closed. It closed right around the same time the Tavern opened up. It sat vacant until 1991 when it was demolished and is now part of our parking lot. I had dinners there with [my] family and stuff like that. [I] still wasn't ever aware that the university was there. The first time I was aware of the university down here was probably in high school. [It] was probably when people mentioned that they were taking maybe a prep-college course down here. Maybe somebody had a brother or sister who was taking courses down here. Somewhere around in high school was when I realized there was a branch campus here. All I was aware of was JC [St. Petersburg Junior College], because that was where my destiny was leading me. I was born to be a JC grad. [I learned about it in] high school, probably. It would have been late 1970s or early 1980s [that] was my first time that I knew of the university down here.

I graduated high school in 1981 and then friends started going to colleges around the state. I think at one point or another I maybe had a friend who took a class down here, or something like that. Until the day I came down here to look at the Tavern as a potential buy, that was my first, wow, look at the size of the university. Up until then, I think the Davis and Coquina buildings were built in the late 1970s if I'm not mistaken. I believe [they were built] in the mid to late 1970s was when those buildings were actually constructed. The formal, USF, here's our spiffy new buildings, were built with the pool and the cafeteria. I think that was mid to late 1970s, which would have been right about the time that I was graduating high school, which is right when my first awareness [was] of this being down there. Up until then, this whole area was just marina-oriented. There was a bar almost directly in front of where we are now here in the Nelson Poynter Library called A Stick in the Rudder. It was there for many, many, many moons. We kind of fill its shoes now, to an extent. There are some great old stories about [the] very early marine science department having great parties over at the Stick in the Rudder. Unfortunately, the gentleman who owned the Stick in the Rudder was, from everything that I hear, a wonderful old Greek guy. He passed away not too long ago. [There were] some wonderful stories about the old marine science crew hanging out there.

J: So it's not always studying.

B: I actually hear there were a lot of classes held over at the Stick in the Rudder at one point or another in time. Have you spoken to Dr. Norm Blake?

J: No.

B: Dr. Blake would be a really good victim. He would be an excellent victim. He's been here for twenty-five years or something like that. [He's been] teaching on this campus for

twenty-five years. He is a character. He can tell you things about the old Stick in the Rudder. You might have to turn off the tape.

J: It'll be one of those after the interview ones. You were established with the Tavern when it was built in 1981?

B: No, it was open in 1981. The building itself, until 1978, was owned by a gentleman by the name of Jonathan Jones. He built it in the mid 1950s, I believe. He was a woodworker and a carpenter. He did custom carpentry on the building. He unfortunately got cancer in the mid 1970s and passed away. That was the end of that. In our building over there, he did all of the original signs for both Disney World and Bush Gardens in that building. The big wooden eagle that's still over there at Busch Garden was made in that building right there. It's kind of neat. There's history in there. The tables that we have inside the Tavern were all made there back in the mid 1950s for Aunt Hatties. When Aunt Hatties closed, Frank Boore came over and said, we're calling it quits. We're going to tear the building down and we're selling everything in an auction. He insisted, he said, I want you to have these tables because all these tables were made here and they need to come back home. All the tables that were inside the Tavern were actually made there back in the early 1950s. I thought that was kind of cool. There's a small loft-type area inside the main area of the Tavern and every once in a while I'll be doing something in my office and some stranger will wander in and wander through. It never fails to be somebody who worked for Jonathan Jones thirty years ago, and I used to work up here painting detail. Up in my work area is where they did all the little detail hand painting and things like that. Somebody will wander through. I had some lady come through not too long ago with her kid. My grandmother used to work here and I wanted to show her

grandson, you know, that kind of thing. It's neat to work in a building that has a little history. Especially history like that, where you can say, it's still existing. His daughter worked here on this campus. I can't remember her name now. She used her married name. She taught on this campus. I'm sure if you talk to certain people they probably [will] remember who she is. I've been told her name a thousand times and I just don't remember it. She was a teacher here on campus. I think she taught either English or history. Maybe it was English history. She taught here on campus for quite some time.

J: Have you hired a lot of students over the years to work for you?

B: We've tried to, and we've had some success. It's a wonderful thing for students. It's a tremendous situation for students. The people who have worked there as a student have realized the benefit of being there. You get to know half of the administration. You get to know half of your professors. You know them on a first-name basis. You've probably shared a beer with them. You know their story. You've sat across the bar and heard them gripe about this class, you know, a bunch of morons! It's a wonderful situation. The handful of students who have really taken the opportunity to work at the Tavern and get to know the people have really reaped the benefits of it, because you do get to know everybody on a one-to-one basis. At a graduate level, when you get to know your professors, not as a professor, but just as a co-worker, it's a lot easier to approach them. It's a lot easier to work with them. Ninety percent of the situations. It's neat. Since 1987 or so, we've always had at least one person who was taking classes [at USF]. It's beneficial to us. They go to class and people say, don't you work over at the Tavern. They say, yeah, I work there, it's a great place. We've got beer and tonight's special is blah blah blah. We've got music next Thursday night. It works. It's a you scratch my

eye and I'll scratch yours kind of thing. People come over to see their classmate. It's neat. It's a good working relationship. It works out well for us as far as time frames because when they're done with school and need to go home for Christmas break or whatever it is, is when we don't need the extra people. It works out really well. When they come back for the semester, we welcome them back and we're off and running again. It works out well. We like to try and get students. We have two students working right now and both of the students have been with us, one's going on two years, and one's about a year and a half. People stay with us. I have employees that have been with us, one's been with us seventeen years, and one's been with the Tavern eighteen years. We actually inherited them. It's like slave labor almost. You're just an indentured service. We bought them with the building kind of thing. Chris and Bonnie, they were purchased with the building. They've been with us for seventeen and eighteen years.

J: [Their names are] Chris and Bonnie?

B: [Their names are] Chris and Bonnie. They're my two sidekicks at the Tavern. They've been there forever and a day. They taught me, the little banker boy who came in who, I could count money, but that was the extent of it. They showed me the difference between salami and pastrami and stuff like that. I didn't know. I actually had to ask that question. Somebody ordered a salami sandwich and I pulled the pastrami out. They said, no.

J: Has the change in demographics of the campus been noticeable in your clientele?

B: Yes, to a degree. We definitely are seeing younger faces than we've ever seen before.

The one thing that I have to say about the campus as it has changed and grown, particularly in the last two years, we're even losing some of that old home feel at the Tavern to an extent. We just don't get to know people. There are too many people now.

I don't mean too many people, you never have too many people, but there's a lot more walk-through. There's a lot more people who just run in, grab a soda, and boom. You don't see them again until next Tuesday. They grab another soda and a bag of chips and boom, they're gone. We don't have the stayers like we used to have, who would come after class and hang out. A lot more faces, a lot younger faces, so yeah, I do see a change in demographics for us. It means we have to stay a lot more on top of our ball. We think we're fickle. As you get a little older, everybody [says] I don't like this. The younger kids change in a heartbeat. [We have to] really try to stay on top of our game as far as what we're serving and how we're serving it and things like that.

J: You're not the only business there. There's the bookstore right next to you.

B: The bookstore's right next to us, Bayboro Books. Susan Culmus and her husband, Eric, they've owned it, it's one of those things, I almost hate to say how long they've owned it. I would imagine it's probably four or five years ago. Probably much to my surprise they'd come in and say no, it's been ten [years]. I think, honestly, it's been four or five years. Before that there was a gentleman by the name of Joe Portezzi. He only owned it for a couple of years. He had to get out of it for health and retirement reasons. He bought it as a retirement business and it was too much. He was retired and he was working more than he was working when he wasn't retired. The original owners of the Tavern were four ladies, very prominent women here in town, all from some family name. They opened it and Mary Bauer, who was one of the original four ladies who owned the bookstore also owns the property and continues to own property today. She would probably be a very good source. She's always been very active here at the university as well. She's always on different committees for the university. I don't know

if you've already spoken to her yet or not. She would probably be a really good source for information, too.

J: I'm sure they get the same thing where people think that they are the university bookstore, but they're not.

B: [They get people who think that] all the time. [It happens] less now, because of the new situation with Barnes and Noble and everything like that. Because of all the newspaper articles and things like that, people are definitely more aware of the situation. The running question now is how much longer are they going to be there? That's the running question we get from customers, not from ourselves. From customers, that's the running question, is do you think they'll make it? I think they will. I hope they will. I love having them as neighbors, too. They're great neighbors and I think it's a good mix. It's a good fit. I hope they stay.

J: Was your own business affected in any way by having the café with the small snack bar [open] on campus?

B: Oh sure, I'm sure it's affected to some extent. Kudos to the new cafeteria people, too, because for years, when I say years, we've been here for seventeen years. For fifteen years, there's never been much competition from the cafeteria because it was cafeteria food. [There were] always a range of complaints we heard about it. The food is this, the food's too expensive, you don't get enough, it sucks, just boom boom boom boom boom, right down the line. In the past year and a half or so, since this new Personal Touch Catering has come in, I've heard wonderful things. It does affect our business. Is there enough business for both of us to survive? Heck yeah. There's enough business.

There's no reason why we both can't survive here on this campus. What happens, I've

been told somewhere in the next five years as the campus begins to grow, they'll start looking at the possibility of putting in a food court consisting of, I don't know what. I would be certain that it would be Wendy's, McDonalds, Long John Silvers. How that will affect us? Your guess is as good as mine.

J: You have the beer.

B: That's what we always say, too. We've got booze, they don't. Now there is that thought. There's the other thought that, how long will the Tavern exist there? We will exist there as long as we're allowed to exist there by the university. I'm assured that the current administration likes us there, [they] want us to be there, [they] want us to continue to operate in the capacity that we're operating in now. That can change. Let's be frank, it's the University of South Florida. It's a big operation. They wouldn't have to knock on too many doors to get us out of there. Eminent domain is pretty powerful. If they decide they want us, for whatever the reasons are, they want to put their own facility there, they want to make it a parking lot, we'd be gone pretty quickly. We wouldn't have the gumption to be able to fight that.

J: Do you have any relationship with, or do you get any people from the airport coming over, too?

B: Sure. We have a really good working relationship with the airport. A lot of people come in and out of that airport. We do some catering for the chartered flights in and out of the airport. We've gotten a lot of celebrities over the years into the Tavern because of the proximity to the airport. Governor [Lawton M.] Chiles [Florida Governor from 1991-1998] used to eat at the Tavern all the time. Senator [Bob] Graham [Florida State Senator, 1970, 1974; Florida Governor, 1978, 1982; United States Senator, 1986, 1992,

1998] eats at the Tavern all the time. Pilots in general [eat at the Tavern], there's a certain requirement if you're a pilot; you have to fly x number of hours in an x period of time in a year. A lot of people will just fly from Ft. Lauderdale to here and they'll wander on over and have a sandwich. We have a really good working relationship with the airport. I'm glad, now that the election has come and gone, and the airport looks like it's going to stay for a while, I'm glad. I'm relieved. I'm happy that the airport is going to stay. I know it hems in the university, to an extent, as far as what they can do, as far as building. Let's be honest, the airport has been here for a heck of a lot longer time than the university has been here. I know it's a heated debate, and I know we've lost a few customers over it because we actually had a Support Alverwood sign up in the bar. I've always taken a stance at the bar that we don't put anything political [up]. People come in and they want me to put Howard Dean for president up on the wall and I won't do it. I felt strongly about this. I put it up. I know we lost a couple of customers over it, but *c'est la vie*. Oh, there's that French thing!

J: You said that you are the bar, and the bar is you. Do you see yourself staying there indefinitely? What are your other interests?

B: We've done other things. We've had other restaurants. We've had other small businesses. We've always come back to the Tavern. We've owned properties. We've done apartment complexes, but the Tavern has always be our base and will always be. My wife and I were talking about what to do with the Tavern not too long ago one night [when we were] home alone. She even said to me, I don't think you could ever get rid of the Tavern. I'm not really sure I'd like you if you got rid of the Tavern. I understand what she meant. I didn't take it as an insult or a slap or anything. I knew what she

meant. We met at the Tavern. She was a student down here doing her undergrad work at the time. She used to come in and study. We got to be buds from there. We knew each other from there. I honestly don't know what I'd do without the Tavern. I don't mean to be hokey about it, but I don't know what I'd do without the Tavern. Will we be there for ever and ever, Amen? Check with me in fifty years. I don't know. I play two dollars in the lottery every week, without fail. That's my one little contribution to the state of Florida; I play the lottery for two bucks each week. I always maintain to allow it to myself that if I won the big bucks, I'd still work at the Tavern. I might take a little more time off, but I'd still own and operate the Tavern, because I've done it for so long, I'm really not sure what else to do with my life.

J: That's lucky to find that.

B: [Yes], it is. Some days I really hate it. Ninety-eight percent of the time I really love it. It's not unlike any kind of job you could possibly have. No matter how much you love it, every once in a while, you're just like, oh, screw it all. Damn it all. I'm moving to France right now. Do I see myself passing it on to my kids? We don't have any children, at least not yet. No, I would definitely encourage them to do other things. I think my wife would probably kill someone if they said, hey mom, I'm going to take over the bar for pop! I think that would be about it. For me, it's been a wonderful life. Like I said, I've met some wonderful people. One of which is my wife.

J: Your wife, obviously, is at the top of the list, but who are some of the other memorable people you've met?

B: Memorable people [that I've met] at the Tavern. I really like Senator Bob Graham. I really like him. He's a really great guy and he was a really neat person to meet. Some of

the people around campus [are] Ron Bugg, who's the utility manager here for the university, he's a great guy. Sudsy Tschiderer is a hoot, I love her to death. We've worked together on different catered events and things like that for years. She's a pleasure to know and a pleasure to work with. A man who I think gets a really bad rap here on campus and I probably wouldn't want to play this tape for him after I said that, I think it's a really bad rap, but who I really, really like is Steve Rich. I've always enjoyed Dr. Rich. Winston Bridges, he just retired recently and I always thought the world of Winston. [He's a] great guy. There's a handful of professors, interim professors, people like Bob Dardean, Bob Hall. [An] absolutely wonderful man [is] Bob Hall. [He is a] wonderful teacher and a great friend and somebody I've known right from the very beginning. [He is] very powerful. Have you spoken to Bob Hall yet? [He is a] wonderful speaker and one of those people you just get the drool coming out of your mouth. They get talking and they keep going, and you [want them to] keep talking, to go, to keep talking. [He is] just a very interesting man to talk to. I wish your legal pad was longer there, you could keep writing names. There have really been some wonderful people come into the Tavern. [We've had] Paul Newman [American actor; professional auto racer], we used to have the Grand Prix's here in 1989. His team used to race here all the time. They used to park right behind the Tavern because there's a little alcove there. They used to park their van behind there. His team always used to come in and eat. His partner died here in a wreck around the turn right behind us here. Paul Newman used to eat at the Tavern every once in a while during his races. That was always kind of cool. As far as big star power, Paul Newman, that's a tough beat there. You're not going to top that, other than some government officials. That's been the extent. We're not the Brown

Derby of Hollywood but we've got our stars of the campus, that's for sure. [There's been] some great people.

J: As somewhat of an outsider with a really good inside view, where do you think the campus is going to go in the next decade?

B: I'm concerned about the autonomy and their want for autonomy. I'm concerned about the competition that USF Bayboro campus has taken on with the St. Petersburg College. I hear things from my wife who teaches at St. Petersburg College and I hear things on this campus. I really think those two sides need to, first of all, get together and smoke the peace pipe and get over it with each other. [They need to] figure out a way to work together. That's number one. We're within miles of each other. It would be a gem of an opportunity for two institutions to work together. That's the two blats on the block. They're going to keep going at each other. Hopefully, as the growing pains subside, because I think both campuses are going through some growing pains, right now, but as those growing pains subside, I think they'll grow together and maybe come together. Wow, that sounded like a politician. As far as this campus goes with just it's situation, we've got to build some stuff, real soon. We've got to get these professors that are stuck in every corner and broom closet on campus in somewhere. I hear a lot of people talking at the Tavern. Some professors, some of the administration, no names, obviously, to be mentioned, no one's feeling the love. We need to get everybody together, maybe in one big room and do that group hug thing. A lot of people that have been here for a period of time are feeling trodden upon on the new people. A lot of the new people aren't feeling like they're getting a response for things that they were promised when they were enticed to come here to teach or to work. There's a lot of work to be done. At the same time,

we're all scrambling around, or they're all scrambling around, working on their accreditation. Everyone's trying to scramble for this accreditation but I see a lot of times where they appear to be working against each other. Maybe [they're not doing it] intentionally, it's just that everyone's got their own agenda, and I think there needs to be some unity on getting to this accreditation and working on the autonomy thing. I really think we need to keep our affiliation, at all costs, with the University of South Florida. I do not think we need to break away in any way, shape, or form, even though I know people like Don Sullivan and some other interested parties think that we should. I really, really think we need to keep our affiliation with the University of South Florida. I think the potential is here. Every student, every parent, everybody I speak to, people who just wander on campus because they're going to use the library or just wander on campus because they wandered on campus, comment on what an absolutely gorgeous campus it is. It has become a gorgeous campus. It was beautiful back twenty-some years ago. It was beautiful because it was eclectic, and it was on the water and there are reptiles out there on the water. Then, it was that quaint, jaws kind of great. Now, it has really blossomed into a really, truly gorgeous campus, with the library here and the Poynter Institute and the [Salvador] Dali museum. We've got the opportunity to do some wonderful things. I think people want to come to school here. I think, gradually we'll even get freshmen and sophomores who want to come here, not just because their parents won't pay for dorms over in Tampa. It's only ten minutes from the house versus forty-five minutes from the house. I understand the parents. The potential is definitely here for the campus. I think the numbers we need to get on this campus, they're saying 10,000 by 2010, something in that neighborhood, dorms in the next three to four years. I think it's

all perfectly attainable. I hope that some of this in-fighting can be taken care of, because they're a lot of it going on. It's not necessarily bad. Change happens. When I was in corporate America, I went from working from a local small-town bank, Flagship Bank, and SunBank came in and took over. They bought us out. I was there during that change. There was a lot of upheaval there. Things eventually leveled out and we became corporate little SunBankees. Things do level out. The upheaval comes, there are some people who get their toes stepped on, and then things level out and things go well. I hope the same thing will happen on this campus. I actually believe that it will.

J: Do you think that the Tavern will help in any way in obtaining that? It's a place where people can go and talk, at least.

B: It does happen. It happens a lot. We seem to be that place where a lot of people who wouldn't normally have the opportunity to sit down on a round table and talk to each other, they somehow manage to get together and come over to the Tavern and have a beer. The bureaucracy is gone at the Tavern. The red tape of bureaucracy. The red tape of how a meeting is supposed to go. That whole, okay, you speak, then you speak, then you speak, and then we have to write it all down on a piece of paper and then the chairman has to put his.... That's all gone. At the Tavern, you get a Coke, or you get a beer, and you're sitting at a table and the music is playing, and there are other people around. You can look at the guy or gal across the table from you and say, you know, that's crap and here's my opinion. That happens at the Tavern. That happens a lot. Sometimes, things become heated. I don't mean fist and cuffs; everybody holds their temper to that extent. I think the Tavern has provided a forum on a couple of occasions for people who wouldn't normally have the opportunity to really say what they want to say to the person

they want to say it to. I hope we continue to do that. For a little while now, the Tavern back many years ago was more of a hangout for administration and professors. We've kind of gotten away from that in the past few years. We became, in five or six years, a student hangout. A student only [hangout]. Now it's getting sick-like again. It's coming around again. We're seeing more and more administration and professors coming over and hanging out. It's getting interesting. Kids are kids. You serve beer, they eat their potato chips, and they giggle about how cute that guy is or how cute the girls are. It's far more interesting when the professors and the administration are there.

J: They might do some of the same.

B: Yeah, they might [say] how cute that person is. It definitely tends to be more interesting.

We used to have a lot of professors way back when, again, when campus was much smaller. There are taboos, and I realize there are taboos. A professor, kind of like a parent, can only afford to be so cool. There is that level. You don't want to overstep your bounds. We used to have a lot of professors who brought classes over to the Tavern and would teach. This time of the year when it's nice and cool, it's bent November now, they used to come and sit out on our deck and bring twenty or thirty students and teach history class right there. It was a hoot. It was always a blast. People walking by would throw in questions or comments about history, or whatever the case was. That doesn't happen anymore, and that's kind of sad. I also understand why it doesn't happen. It leaves them wide open to problems. I understand that not happening. I do like the fact that it does seem like a lot of the professors have decided to come back our way, and administration as well. That's neat.

J: Where would you like the Tavern to go in the next ten years?

B: Let's see, [a] franchise as large as Hooters, and my own blimp. Where would I really like to see the Tavern in ten years from now? I would actually like to see the Tavern doing what it's doing. The Tavern is a great little thing. Our CPA is always [saying] grow, grow grow! We've got to put this in, we've got to do that. We need smoothies and we need that. He's got great ideas, and I love his ideas. We listen and we talk and we kid about things, and we do change. We change what we're serving because customer demands. The Tavern is just a great little thing. Sometimes, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. We just serve sandwiches. We don't try to be pretentious. We're a college pub. I have people come in and curl their lip and say, is this it? Yeah! This is it! We're a college pub. We serve beer, soda, sandwiches, and salads. If you want filet mignon, there are plenty of places downtown that would be perfectly happy to provide. We're just a place where people come, have a beer, and talk, and listen to music a couple of nights a week when we have music. If we're doing that ten years from now, as long as I can sit down at the end of the month and pay my employees and pay my provisioners, what else [do I need]? I'm perfectly content with that. As the university continues to grow, we'll continue to try to accommodate as best we can. After all, we're about as built out as we're going to be. We don't have a lot of space to go. I might be able to fit another four by four foot deck over here in the corner somewhere. That's really all I can do.

J: Are you required to maintain your own parking? Does the city require you to do that? You're surrounded by this big parking lot.

B: We actually have twenty-two spots that are designated Tavern on the Green or Bayboro Books parking. There's a long-term lease. There's a parcel of land that spans from the back of our building all the way out to Sixth Avenue South that's actually our property

that MaryAnn Bauer, the owner of the property, long-term leased to the university. The university is actually using part of our land for their parking lot. We have twenty-two of our own spaces. By law, I think for every four seats you have to have one parking spot, if I remember correctly. If that is truly the case, we're way out of the water. We don't have anywhere close to what we're supposed to have. The city, also, in licensing looks at the fact that your clientele is pretty much still coming from the university, and the university has ample parking. They give you a little slide there, because of that. Again, as far as our growth, if we went to the city and said, we want to put a second story on and we're going to put this deck over here and we're going to put this big building here, they'd probably shoot us right down because we don't even have the room for the parking. We're probably cutting the edges as it is right now.

J: Plus, parking is always an issue on campus.

B: Parking is always an issue, but what's more of an issue is that people are lazy. Parking is an issue; don't get me wrong. I know lots of people who have lots of issues on parking here, especially with the new brilliant gold parking pass. We have, in the Tavern, in both of the restrooms, both ladies' and men's, large chalkboards the size of this window here right behind you. [They are] huge, six foot high by however long, and it never fails, if I erase the board within a couple of days there will be a comment about the gold parking spots. [The comments are] questioning your sexual orientation if you have a gold parking pass. They are not popular, and whoever came up with this really great idea, it's not popular. It has become very frustrating to see this major portion of this parking lot sit empty while people are without parking. It's funny to look at the gold parking, and we can go out of there right now, after we finish this interview and look, but if you look in

that gold parking lot, it's amazing. It's a car show [with] the BMW's, the Mercedes, the Land Cruisers. It's the parking for the elite, hands down. There's no better display of elitism than that gold parking lot at this university. It's funny to look and see. Again, as far as the parking issue here on this campus, there is ample parking, but people are lazy. I'm lazy, you're lazy. We're all lazy to our own extent. Where do you want to park? You want to park within fifty feet or do you want to park down the block? For a young woman, coming out of class 9:00 at night, it's dark, this area is still a borderline area. It's ten times better than it was fifteen years ago, but it has its seedy side. I wouldn't [want a] nineteen year old young lady walking to her car having to walk two blocks. I would be skittish, too. They have started a safe-ride program here on campus recently. I'm not real sure how you find these people, but I see them riding around in their little electric cart and they have these yellow shirts. No where on campus does it tell you, if you need a ride, call the safe-ride crew. I don't know how you go about doing that.

J: [You probably call] the campus police.

B: Yeah, I guess you call the campus police. The parking lot is the issue, but most of the reason the parking lot is the issue is that we're just lazy. The gold parking is really quite funny.

J: What other issues come up on the chalkboards?

B: Political [issues come up]. My favorite chalkboard period of time is coming up with the elections coming up. The presidential elections are just a hoot. The chalkboards just go on fire with comments about different policies of people. It's an absolute hoot to watch the debates on the chalkboard. People, as they sit there in the evening, and have another couple of drinks of either Coca Cola or Budweiser, they need to make several trips. As

they make several trips, full conversations begin to develop on the chalkboards, complete dialogues about well, how about that? Okay, well how about this? Oh, well, same to you! It's a hoot to watch. Political seasons are wonderful for the chalkboards.

Approaching graduation periods, [in the] spring, [the chalkboards] get a lot of teary goodbyes from people. [Making crying sounds] Oh, four years of my life, that kind of stuff. Then you get your usual bathroom fodder as well. I attribute it to the clientele here. They're not your average joe-blow from off the street, for the most part. That's few and far between.

J: Punctuation is pretty good on these?

B: No! [It's] atrocious! Punctuation is absolutely thrown out the window. I think this is their release from their graded papers. I really do think this is their chance to go, period? Who needs a stinkin' period? It's fun, because the really funny part about that, is the professors who come in will correct [the errors]. You'll see all those grammatical things, (sp), you'll see all those in there. I try to keep different colored chalk in there and the professors use it. They'll take it out. If it's written in white chalk, they'll grab either pink or red and do (sp) where the little added tents. It's a hoot. They'll actually correct text on the bathroom walls when they're using the facilities. It's a sickness, I think. I'm not really sure, I think it's a sickness. There are comments about teachers. A lot of times if there's been a particularly tough test, I notice business for some reason. I don't know why. Business students seem to be more chalkboard vocal.

J: They need more of an outlet?

B: I don't know what it is, but yeah. If professor xyz gave a particularly tough accounting test or macroeconomic test, it'll say, professor so-and-so gave an [expletive] test on

Tuesday night. It's funny. You always know who's giving good tests by whose name is written on the board. You always know if it's a good test or not. That's always a fun thing at the Tavern, too. The finals week down at the Tavern is always a hoot, too. You definitely see them crying in their beer and you definitely see them hooting and hollering and having a good time about it, too. You can definitely tell the ones that are done.

There's never debating that. The ones that just took their last test, there's never the debate there. They're usually the ones that are buying the beer and smiling a whole heck of a lot. Usually they have family members to meet them there, too.

J: Do students tend to hang out in cliques or clusters depending on their major?

B: Yeah. [There are] big-time cliques. English studies, all the liberal arts stuff, they keep to themselves. Business people all sit around in their little business groups. I think it's because you have to do all those presentations so they stick with their presentation groups. They form a company, a lot of the business students have to form a company and keep it from inception from their first year and do the paper work. They'll get their clique going and they'll all wear their shirts for the xyz company. It's funny, and it's funny to watch. Business students, notoriously, are always the ones that really think they party, and they don't. They'll be seventy-four of them that'll come in and they'll get one pitcher. You see them the next day and they're like, oh, man, what a party last night. They had a Dixie cup. Business students are notorious for that. English students are the sit-down, talk about it, [wearing their] little berets. They live up to the whole 1960s, snap their fingers, smoky, poetry being read in the corner [view]. It's funny. You see these things. You see these stereotypes in movies, or you read about them in books, but there's an element of truth there. As sick as it might sound, there's truly an element of truth

there. I always get such a kick out of the business students. They really [say] oh, man, what a party last night. Yeah, calm down there Sarah.

J: You should see the education people.

B: Yeah, the education people. Woohoo! It's a funny situation. [laughing] Then there's the librarians.

J: Were there any topics or questions that you thought I would ask you that I haven't asked you? Anything that you wanted to get on tape forever?

B: No, I really didn't know what to expect coming in here. I really didn't know if you were going to drill me on, give me the dirt! I really don't know any dirt. You hear whispers and gossip about things like that. What we've already covered is fine; the growth of the campus. There was probably a lot of great dirt to be had back in 1987 and 1988. It was a really, really, really [small campus]. When they had a party over at the pool, it was a party. It was five kegs and a band playing. It was a great time, and everybody always had a great time. There were always funny stories from that. Somebody always would do something that they wouldn't have normally done if they hadn't had been chugging a keg for four hours. It's been a great ride for me. I've really been able to ride on the coat-tails of the university. It's been a wonderful opportunity to have a business and work so closely with a whole group of people, and work with them closely for a long period of time. Most people don't have that opportunity. When you work in an office anymore, you're lucky if you have your officemates for a couple of years before they make a lateral move to go somewhere else to another company. I've been working with people like Norm Blake for seventeen years. He's been here for twelve years before that. He's just one of many, many people who have been here forever and ever, that I've gotten to work

with forever. It's been a great ride for me, with the university here. I hope I can leech off of them for a couple more years. I feel guilty sometimes, because it's a no-brainer. I own a bar next to a college campus. It's not a tough thing. I hope I'm able to do it for a few more years before they decide, well, enough of this bar thing by the campus.

Fortunately, it's all come back in vogue again. For a few years that stopped. All of the universities, particularly the private universities, but all the universities stopped having bars anywhere close or near ...

(end of side A)

B: For a long time they had stopped having any kind of facility for their students on campus, or even close to campus because it was taboo. There were a couple of young deaths so they stopped the Rathskellar at UT over in Tampa. They closed it. The Empty Keg over at USF in Tampa, they closed that. Eckerd closed theirs. For a little while, they were getting a little nervous. We didn't know what our life expectancy was. We thought, maybe this might be it for us. They've all reopened. Eckerd just opened up their place. Tampa has got a small thing going in the food court area. It's not necessarily a pub, but they've got a little thing going over there. I hear the Rathskellar opened back up at UT. Hopefully, we've got some breathing room again. We do have the thing that we're not on USF property. I suppose, until the day comes that they want, for whatever reason, to obtain that property, we'll probably just keep doing what we're doing.

J: That's great. Thanks for coming by and talking this afternoon.

B: Thank you. I've got enough of an ego that I love talking. Thank you.

End of Interview

