

**Interview with Richard Delgado in Santa Rosa December 09, 2011**

Transcribed by Isaac Valdez

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**DD:** Could you tell me a little bit about where you grew up in Santa Rosa?

**Delgado:** I grew up here in the neighborhood right on top of the hill in Santa Rosa and my folks, when I was very young, my dad ran Pueblo Courts, which was a Magnolia station, a service station and a motel (motor court) and my mother was a housewife all her life pretty much, until my father passed away, so we grew up partially in that house on old Route 66: there was a residence connected to the business and actually I was born in that building.

**DD:** Would this be the east or west side of town?

**Delgado:** It would be the central part of town, near where Joseph's restaurant is, right across the street.

**DD:** When were you born?

**Delgado:** 1953

**DD:** You went to elementary and high school here?

**Delgado:** In Santa Rosa, yes. Elementary school was St. Rose of Lima School it was the catholic school and the Santa Rosa high school was a public school.

**DD:** And when did you graduate?

**Delgado:** 1971

**DD:** How big was Santa Rosa back then, we're talking about your high school years--I guess in the late sixties--how big a town was it?

**Delgado:** Population-wise, Santa Rosa was larger and in terms of numbers of businesses there were more, and they were all motels, restaurants, and little cafes and drive-ins and so forth. The population of Santa Rosa back then was, we can check the census but I'm thinking around 3,200 and it went as high as 3,600 in 1985 and now it's back down to around 2,200.

**DD:** And they were mostly roadside businesses?

**Delgado:** Yes they were.

**DD:** Well I'm certainly looking forward to talking with you about your earliest memories of being on Route 66. Now did your dad have the gas station when you were young?

**Delgado:** Yes, I don't remember the Magnolia and the motorcourt that well, I was very young when we moved, there's pictures though that I've seen which is evidence that I'd lived there. There was actually a Shamrock station right across the street so my dad

picked that up, probably when I was about five or six years old, and then he also operated a Texaco station and a drive-in on the east side of Santa Rosa, which was back then was actually outside the city limit right at the top of the hill. So he operated two gas stations and the drive-in for a period of time, about four years.

**DD:** The drive-in...

**Delgado:** It was a drive-in restaurant, Skylane Drive-In, just a little hamburger stand.

**DD:** So did you start working in the gas stations?

We always worked in the gas stations growing up. My brothers and I all did. You know, a lot of these stations had, you know, grown up men working, you know where a car would drive up and you'd do a fill-up with gas, clean windshields and check radiators and fill water bags and the whole thing. We did that. My brothers and I did that. I'm the fourth oldest. The family used to do that.

**DD:** So I guess I should ask you your favorite Route 66 stories from those days, from when you were young.

**Delgado:** Well there's a whole bunch of them, you know. Probably one of my favorites, it had to have been early sixties, I was probably ten years old or so. That's the Texaco station on top of the hill, and I think I was a little bit of a pest, that was my nickname in fact. So my older brothers they taught me cars; they taught me cars and pickups and makes and models and years the whole thing. So they had me sit on the side of the road, which was a two lane back then, and take surveys of cars going by. And it wasn't so much that my survey work was important, they were getting me out of their hair and I didn't realize that until a couple of years later. So I had to sit on some little Coke crates, they were wooden crates back then. I'd sit on the side of the road and count cars that went by. Chevys and whatever make, Fords and whatnot.

**DD:** Do you still have those by chance?

**Delgado:** Oh no. Pretty much as far as relics or things that were kept in that station, that's been many years ago so we didn't see those as collector items at the time.

**DD:** I mean it would actually be quite useful to know. Do you remember any of the results of your surveys?

**Delgado:** No I don't remember (laughs), But I was pretty thorough, you know, I thought I was doing important work for them.

**DD:** You WERE doing important work, although it would take history to catch up to.

**Delgado:** There you go, yeah. You know one of my other favorite stories of that same location is, my older brother, Orlando, and I worked together a lot. We used to walk from home, which is right here on top of the hill by those water tanks, walk all the way up to

the station and then help out pretty much all day long. We loved being at the station because we were in contact with the outside world there. One of my favorite stories is, there were some large boulders behind that station and during our lunch breaks we'd take some sodas and sandwich and a bag of chips and get up on these boulders and now if you go to the existing La Quinta hotel in Santa Rosa those boulders were incorporated into an outdoor, spa, hot tub and so forth--so it's an old patio. So it's really cool that those boulders had one life when we were there and now to see them used in a totally different, not context, but they're just so instrumental in how that place was built.

**DD:** That's great. It's just like Route 66 and its many uses over time. And of course, did you meet a lot of the travelers that would come through?

**Delgado:** Oh we met travelers every day. I think that's one of the things about me growing up here, having that opportunity and meeting people essentially from all over the world, and at a very young age.

As you know this is New Mexico, Santa Rosa has always been a largely Hispanic community, and I think having that exposure to the outside world was important, because prior to Route 66 this was an agricultural community, it was farming, it was ranching. Both of my grandparents were actually shepherders so it's quite a change and an economic opportunity for the people who lived out here to further their families and make more money; better all the way around, better quality of life and the whole thing. So we met travelers every day, it was one of the neatest things because, you know, we'd wash windshields, we'd check oil, we'd pump gas, we'd check pressure in tires, and you always had a chance, we'd sweep floorboards, and we'd do that with everyone. It was neat because, number one, I made rows of tips, I was always able to buy a baseball glove and bikes and the whole things and we had a mo-ped and a motorcycle later on so we always had that money to help us sort of, you know, have a little fun; and otherwise, we would have been butchering sheep and taking care of a couple of cows and milking cows otherwise. I think all in all it was great.

**DD:** Now you must've talked to the people that came through: do you remember any stories or unusual people that came through?

**Delgado:** I always remember people. In terms of an unusual story, not really. Other than just the comments that they would make to us that we were so young .

**DD:** My old friend Rudy Anaya (with whom I used to teach and I still see, he's still going strong) tells a funny story about being at one of these gas stations and for the first time he was the point of encounter of the mexicanitos, as he called himself, with the gringos who came in from the outside. Was that fairly common?

**Delgado:** I know what story you're talking about, where he went home and told his mother he wanted to be a tourist because he thought it was so cool. I think because we were around tourists since an early age, and another thing is we were never taught that there was "Anglo", "Hispanic", "Indian" or whatever, I think because of that since an

early age I just never knew that it even existed. It wasn't until you start getting older and you realize these things so I would have to say I sort of had a different experience where we were exposed to it at such a young age that it was always the same.

**DD:** And where did they come from? Do you remember?

**Delgado:** They came from everywhere. They came from California, they came from out east. So I think we had just people coming from all directions. Pretty much everywhere.

Part of the survey thing was, you know, license plates and how many from such state and so forth. You know, they came from everywhere during our time, early sixties. So pretty much they were people on vacation; the dust-bowl days were already pretty much over; this was more the vacationing families. I do remember filling water bags. They had the air conditioners on the windows but people that couldn't afford a window air conditioner would use a water bag in the window. You know they used to have two or three bags, they always had those. Always had to check radiators because things were very different in those days in terms of automobiles. As far as the length of trips, we get in a car now and we can go three, four hours without stopping and back then they were going an hour at a time. I might be wrong but I'm pretty sure I'm right.

**DD:** What were the most common problems that the travelers had?

**Delgado:** It was overheated radiators, shock absorber type stuff. Our roads weren't so good back in those days. Probably those type of things, probably more minor things than anything.

**DD:** Is it possible to distinguish between the sixties and seventies, your high school and right after, between tourists and travelers? In the thirties and forties, there weren't so many people that traveled Route 66 or that had even heard of it. At some point that begins to change.

**Delgado:** True

**DD:** When would you think that would change?

**Delgado:** Today, it's very easy to make a distinction between a traveler, especially in Santa Rosa, because we have I-40, and we have travelers and we have actual tourists and as far as people coming into Santa Rosa as their destination, there are some, but the majority are travelers. Back then, everyone had to come through Santa Rosa, so all of them were travelers. Some were tourists, some were on business. I hope I'm not getting off course here but, I think just like anything else, there was a percentage and each for those, being able to remember or, you know, place an identification on which was a traveler or which was a tourist; Tourists are easy, you know, but being able to tell you how many were! There was a way to tell though. You know, the travelers are more in a hurry and the tourist is, "What do you got? What can I go see?" and so forth, "Where can I kind of spend some time to take it easy?"

**DD:** What would you say is the percentage today?"

**Delgado:** Today Santa Rosa is mostly a pass-through, unfortunately. So it's a very high percentage of travelers. If we were to take a total of gross receipts and even lodger's tax I think the larger percentage is just people going through.

**DD:** Before we come to the present time I still want to get us back to the old days, for example, can you remember when that Elfield Johnson Warehouse was functioning?

**Delgado:** I remember very well. The reason is because my dad had a Texaco station and Rudolph Johnson was a jobber, now I'm talking about the era when the Texaco jobber was The Rudolph Johnson Warehouse not Charles Elfield. There are people who remember the Elfield Warehouse when it was an actual wholesaler warehouse, and I believe there are still some in Santa Rosa. I remember it because with the Texaco station my dad utilized Rudolph, purchased gas, oil... Pretty much everything at the station came off of Rudolph. A couple of other salesmen that came through and sold, you know, candy, certain parts and stuff like that, but most of the supplies came from Rudolph Johnson and he did have a headquarters in the warehouse, I remember going in there many, many times with my dad.

**DD:** What was that like? When it was functioning.

**Delgado:** As far as the building itself, the building is intact, which is amazing. But when you walk in, what I really remember is that his front office had all the Texaco tankers, and the trucks and the toys and the ships, and he had all of the stuff up on the wall, on display cases, and he had a lot of other smaller items in the front area of that building. As you walked towards the back he had all the oil cans and the other supplies and he utilized those docks so there was oil barrels and, of course, oil cans and so forth and windshield wiper refills and he had all the displays for all of the after-auto market stuff and then as you go further back he had all the gas pumps and parts for gas pumps and so forth. He utilized his space very well.

**DD:** He took up the whole place?

**Delgado:** He took up the whole place. First floor and basement.

**DD:** And about how many people were there working in those days?

**Delgado:** For Rudolph, I don't know how many people worked for him, I know his son Jimmy worked for him, I remember him very well because he would come up and fill up our tanks with gas, so I remember Rudolph and Jimmy very well. I don't know how many people he had working for him. I think he had his wife always working for the company, Sophie. So beyond that I can't tell you.

**DD:** And this would be in the Sixties?

**Delgado:** Yeah, this would be in the Sixties. Rudolph I think purchased the warehouse in the very late forties, early fifties, and I think right away he was already a jobber and had a building over by the river and he needed more space so as soon as he leased the building, he was a Texaco jobber.

**DD:** It strikes me that that building is a kind of metaphor for the transition from railroad-dominated economy to car-dominated economy.

**Delgado:** I agree a hundred percent, and I wish I could expound that a little bit more but I think it's very true.

**DD:** I mean everything in Santa Rosa used to come by train, in the old days, right? At some point would it be in the late twenties things began to shift?

**Delgado:** Things began to shift yeah. As Route 66 developed, even though there were already roads of course, but nothing but dirt roads. In fact, Route 66 was still a dirt road even as I was growing up, you know at the Magnolia? That was still a dirt road right there. As I've seen in pictures.

**DD:** I thought they were paving it in '37. But not through Santa Rosa?

**Delgado:** Well it might have been paved over in old Route 66, on the pre-1937 alignment. It might have been somewhat paved, coming in off of the side in Bluebell Road and down through 4<sup>th</sup> street and after the realignment, I know that this section right here wasn't paved until 1951 or '52 and that's right here in a place called Park Avenue. So I think that stretch out there was pretty much an all-weather road to a certain point. So when I was very young, '56-'57, it was still an all-weather road, still a gravel road.

**DD:** In '56-'57 was that the new alignment?

**Delgado:** Yes that was the new alignment.

**DD:** How did that new alignment come about, do you know?

**Delgado:** Probably because of the way that the road came in. You can actually eyeball it from up there, and in pre-1937 you can see the old alignment further over to the south, which came in on which they called "Route 66 Airport". So that older track or trail, road, I think that was highway 3, came down through Blue Hole and it could have been things like, as they were getting this new highway over to the east and that whole realignment was falling into place, I think that they realized that they needed a straight shot right into Santa Rosa. So again, you can sort of eyeball that as you look either way from the top or from the bottom, you can kind of see where that is.

**DD:** When was Route 66 closed and you bypassed?

**Delgado:** I don't know the exact date but it was probably late '71, when the freeway actually opened.

**DD:** Wow, very early as compared to other places.

**Delgado:** Yeah, very true, and it could have been early 1972, but not much beyond that.

**DD:** What was the feeling in the town, if I can bring you back to those days, when you were just graduating?

**Delgado:** From high school, yeah...

**DD:** And probably tooling around with a car, as people had cars back then. What was the feeling in the town? If you can remember, were they worried, were they angry, what was it?

**Delgado:** I have to go back to my own family and my father, and where he essentially was knowing what was coming, was selling and getting out of business, so I'm thinking it was sixth grade when we were giving up the Texaco station, or early seventh grade, and because we were so attached to being up there, and going to work and making a little bit of money, I remember being very sad that we were not going to be able to do that. My dad started working for the state of New Mexico and so I really think that there was a preparation going on as far as two years, three years out, to pretty much close businesses. Because I think they had seen bypassed communities already and they knew what was coming. So I think there was a preparation, I think there was some changes that were being, either planned, and some people, if they weren't ready for it, I'm sure they changed pretty quick after that. So they closed. Stations did close. Restaurants did close. People did close and go out of business.

**DD:** And your dad he closed his businesses?

**Delgado:** He actually sold both of them, and both of those someone kept on renting those. One guy got the place down at the bottom of the hill and the other place, they closed the drive-in and the station operated for a couple more years and then they tore it down. And it belonged to a guy named Charlie Sanford, the building and the property itself belonged to Charlie Sanford. So he tore it down and built a motel and a newer restaurant there.

**DD:** Which motel was that?

**Delgado:** That is the Travelodge now, it was called the Shawford in those days. The drive-in pretty much sits on the same site where Route 66 Restaurant is on the top of the hill right now. So Skyline Drive-In was right pretty much in that same place.

**DD:** Do you remember the first time you drove on the new road?



**Delgado:** I do remember. We actually used to get out there when we weren't supposed to and, you know, go cruising with a couple of friends and a couple of girls and so we'd do that and it was amazing, you know, we thought it was just neater than heck to get out there. But I think at the same time we understood that it was going to hurt the community. Well, just being on a road that really wasn't open yet and being able to see the town from a different angle, and in fact I worked out there when I got out of high school.

**DD:** You worked out there?

**Delgado:** On the construction of that road. Yeah. Oh, so maybe my dates are a little bit off, because I said late '71... Or could've been... That year into '72...

**DD:** Do you remember the day that the bypass opened?

**Delgado:** No I don't.

**DD:** But there must have been a rather dramatic change in traffic.

**Delgado:** Well, you know, prior to the freeway opening, there were times when it was busy, when it was hard to get onto Route 66 from the side roads. So there was a dramatic change and I think people, again, from when it was opened all the way to about '85, I think Santa Rosa was probably in its worst economic era ever.

**DD:** Now you've mentioned the gas stations closed, restaurants closed, were there anything else?

**Delgado:** Bars. There was probably ten or eleven bars at one time. It was a lot. If you look at old pictures of Santa Rosa, there was gas stations and little cafes and bars, you know just one after another from the west side. Well back in those days, there was nothing on that hillside but when you got over the east there was more businesses out that way. As you got into the late seventies and early eighties, it started to kind of string along out that way, but there was still a whole bunch of them.

**DD:** And the churches? Did they close?

**Delgado:** No I think the churches have always sort of held their own. I think there's always been a population base so as far as new churches or old churches closing, not really. There's been some new denominations that have come in, you know, like Jehovah's Witnesses.

**DD:** And where did the people go? Did they leave town?

**Delgado:** They left town. They left town to work elsewhere and we had a drain already with people graduating and leaving town to go to college and leaving anyway but I think it was even more so back when we were bypassed.

**DD:** Does anything else come to mind in the time immediately after the bypass? I wonder what it must have been like to drive down the main street of town and suddenly see all the bars and places closed.

**Delgado:** They didn't all close immediately. But there was a lot that did close, but you're right it's just one of those things. There's a guy that still owns a station here, I mean it's been closed since back then, the Exxon on top of the hill, very well preserved. Back then my dad had approached me and said "You know what, he's looking for someone to open that place up, you could lease it" and I said "Whew, there's no traffic up there, what would you do? Sell gas and change tires and change some oil? Fix tires, that's all you really can do." And I joined the army shortly after that.

So, going back to your question, I think there was a state of, not emergency, but great distress and I know a lot of people were just... if they hadn't sold already or closed down already, they were figuring out ways to get out of business and I really think some of these guys were just holding on to what little they could. And that's why they had a lot of these family businesses that endured, and I think a lot of people that just had employees pretty much just folded up. And then any time you had a real cost, you know when the gas stations had to fix the underground tanks and so forth, I mean that was pretty much it. They said "I can't do that" and just closed up. So I think at that point everyone was vulnerable, everyone. And there were just some that just kind of hung in there.

**DD:** One of the topics that Kaisa Barthuli is really interested in our talking about, and it's something that's got to be close to your heart, are the dilemmas in trying to being a small-time merchant on 66 and survive. Now you have this period where survival becomes really critical, between, say '73 or '74 and the decade after, how did people survive? Was there any traffic going through?

**Delgado:** Yeah, there's always been traffic, that's why we have all of these motels and so forth. Let's see if I can do the best I can with that. You know, again, if you look at the survivors out there, I think a lot of it was, the owner and they had a way to keep that place open and operating with their family, and I think everyone else sort of went by the wayside but, you know I see that even today. You get an owner or an absentee owner and they hire a manager, which most of the time might be a good manager but it's not the same thing, being an owner and being on top of your business day in and day out.

Let me back up a little bit. I think in Santa Rosa, your percentages are much better out on Route 66. If you look at our downtown, even now our retail is going away. Sadly, the theater closed last year. And he was open up until that point. And now, this little retailer, VNS Variety, they're closing. The clothing store closed last year. There's two left but there were as many as eight at one time. So I think that even though the traffic has declined, I-40 is still our life blood so the businesses along the Route, even though there's less of those, they are able to survive and make a living, but again they are pretty much family-owned. I can't really think of too many of those that are absentee-owned or that are corporation-owned that are doing really well other than the truck stops. The rest are

pretty much family. Even if you look at your new East Indians, they're essentially family owned even though they're franchises, it's families that are running those places. That's the other great transition, as you know, on Route 66. So, I think in all rural communities, in all of these areas all over the country all of the small towns are running into that. But, you just don't give up and... There's always that die-hard part of the community, that that's their community; and that you're going to stay there and you're going to do everything that you can to make it work. In that regard, I think Santa Rosa is very lucky that we have that, not going to say core group, but those long time families that have set roots, and I for one don't want to go anywhere. One of my aunts, she's a nun over in Amarillo, says "It's so neat that you and Davie have stayed in Santa Rosa" because a lot of families have moved on, you know, jobs and everything else and so I think you have to have, there has to be a certain love. So I think it's the same for everyone else.

**DD:** Well if there are two families, and two businesses, and one sort of says "Here I am in Santa Rosa and here I stay" and another says "You know, I could make fifty percent more money if I move to Edgewood or Moriarty..." what determines when someone makes that choice?

**Delgado:** Boy, I don't know... I think there's just a lot of factors when people make decisions on moving, be it business or personal reasons.

**DD:** Well if you think back to people that moved out, during that period, so many of them you probably went to high school with or you went to high school with their families, and then some of those same people, they stayed with their families. Can you think back to how they were making that decision?

**Delgado:** There's just so many different ways to answer that. I think in general it's what they call the "Brain Drain." You have a large number of people, they move on, they go to college, they establish themselves in the world, doing different kinds of jobs, different careers and so forth. And then as far as business people, we did lose a lot of really good business people that said exactly what you are saying "Oh, I can go somewhere else, put the same time in, same investment in, in a different area and do well and do better..." so I think there's a whole bunch of different answers to that.

I don't really know what makes a person stay. The things that I do know is that a lot of people have gone on, and degreed, and done a life elsewhere with a career, raised children and a family elsewhere. And they always want to come back. Now they don't always actually do come back, but they always have that dream in their head "Yeah I want to go back to Santa Rosa." There are a bunch that have done that. So there are people that have lived all over the world, that are back in Santa Rosa and Puerta Luna, you know and I think I hope I'm not getting too far off base here but I think there's still, it's just one of those things: you have family ties and roots in the community, you have history in that community. I think a lot of people just have a real strong, once they establish that and they feel that, it's hard to let it go and you have such a love for the land and wanting to be there, and I think for some it's just easy for them to say "You know, I can just put my roots down somewhere else and it's just as good."

**DD:** Ok so, I'm going to ask you now to put your hat of tourism director on here.

**Delgado:** Ok.

**DD:** Because, one of the other issues that the park service is trying to understand is how they can support small businesses that are embedded in the community--if I may characterize what you are saying--there are people that have roots that are intending to stay and trying anything they can do. If people want pickles, they'll put in a pickle booth.

**Delgado:** Yes.

**DD:** I guess my question is, how do you survive on Route 66? In Santa Rosa, during this period that starts in, say 1984.

**Delgado:** '84 on was the time when I think was probably some movement, even some younger people starting to come back. Even though we were bypassed, I-40 was still there, even from an early time. I think the lodger's tax has really helped all of our communities and has helped Santa Rosa. So going back to even the, lodgers tax began probably in '78 or so, '79 I'm not sure, I wasn't involved with the city at all. But to answer the question for my job and from what I've seen as a chamber director and tourism director, you look at what the community has to offer in terms of attractions, history, and as far as your businesses you look for the strong suit in each of those businesses and do the best you can to... You know back in the day it was always Club Café and we have Blue Hole, Club Café, and people say "Oh, I go to Santa Rosa, what's that place? Club Café! Exactly!" you know those are the kind of things we've always been able to, and should, capitalize on--Comet Drive-In and of course, the people. We've always tried to make sure these business people know and realize that your front line, the people that meet these people every day are our best salesmen and, I think again, I learned from a very early age so when you read about it and find that out from hospitality gurus down at NMSU, you say "Yeah well, you know, I knew that all along."

And I think that is something that all these people, being small business people understand, that you treat everyone with respect regardless if they have money or not, or what kind of customer they are. You don't want someone coming in and ripping off your store, but those are the things you watch out for and providing good customer service is part of it. So I think everyone in Santa Rosa, especially small business people, have always understood those type of things and I think repeat business is very important to what these people do. If you take Silver Moon for example, you can sit down and have a hamburger, and somebody will come in and say, "Yeah I came in here last year" or "I came in here twenty years ago, I love coming in here every time I come through Santa Rosa." I hear that a lot. I think all these guys have established that sort of rapport and a recommendation from the people who do travel and stop there to eat. I answer the phone a lot and people call, "I'm looking for this building in Santa Rosa and it looks like this..." "Oh I know what you're talking about." So they can't quite remember what somebody told them, so all of those things are important.

**DD:** There was a time when Santa Rosa was completely dependent on Route 66, before the bypass. But since then, you still have plenty of old hotels. Supposing somebody wanted to come here and do a Route 66 themed store, not directed so much at Santa Rosa, but basically people who are Route 66 tourists. What would make them succeed and what would make them fail?

**Delgado:** What would make them succeed would be really good marketing, as good marketing as you can put out there. I think with what we have, and the kind of money that we spend, I think we would get pretty good bang for our buck. So, one of the things that I think we've been doing pretty well, is that we try to treat all of the business people the same and make sure we, as the city tourism department, help each of those guys promote themselves, and to promote the community as a whole. So, I think that a Route 66 themed gift shop would be very good. The Route 66 auto museum does very well. It's on the east side of Santa Rosa about two miles from here on the right hand side, there's a big yellow car out on a post and so forth. There are several elements to his place there, first of all it's just that outside, the car on the pole, the whole idea that you're out on Route 66. Then you come in, there's a gift shop, and then on the inside of that there's a museum. There's more than cars and there's a lot of cool artifacts in the whole thing. There's a fee to get into the back part, but of course in the gift shop there's not, and there's a lot of neat stuff in the gift shop. But, number one, I sort of call it a "Glorified Car Dealership" because he's in the business to sell cars, that's really what he does. He has his own cars that he restores, he'll consign cars, so that's their main business. But having that five dollars about ten times a day doesn't hurt either. But I know there are times when they get groups.

Going back to your question, I think if we were to really market to group tours, to the international travelers, to domestic travelers, and be able to just say here's this really special place in Santa Rosa, even though yes there are some in other states and a couple in Texas and a couple in Missouri now. I think people are looking for that and they want to see that local flavor. I think it would be good. My friend Johnny Myers, we've talked about bringing his museum into the Elfield warehouse many, many, times, and we hope to do that some day. I'm of the opinion you need to have a mix. For me, I like the idea of a micro-brewery. I've found different examples of some of these places and how good they work. There's one in Australia called Little Creatures and it's just the neatest place. I think if you start mixing up your market, so to speak, because a lot of times they do have a way to work well with each other. The brewery type of food would meld in very well. It's like Hard-Rock Café and those type of themed restaurants, having the true museum quality artifacts but also having this public area where this guy who may not be a die-hard Route 66 buff but it's still interesting to go into like the diner over in Albuquerque. "Oh yeah me and my family can come in here, and my kids and so forth will have a good ol' time!" and they could go in there, so there's something that you need for everybody. So that's just my idea, and hopefully we can go somewhere with that.

**DD:** You've talked a little about your ideas about what would make them succeed: family presence, where people are working for free in some cases, kids and things like that, general marketing techniques that would apply to almost any city, no matter what they

had, and of course the first line, representation: the people that you talk to when you knock on the door and say “Hi, I’m a Route 66 tourist” or something, those are all really important. What would allow someone to fail at that? What kinds of things would you do wrong?

When I look at a failed business in Santa Rosa, I always just believe that when an owner, when the person that has the largest stake in that place is not present, that is its biggest detriment and it has a very good chance of failing. If you have a person going in with the intent that they are going to spend eight to ten, even twelve hours a day in that business he will succeed. If it’s right for the market.

**DD:** What would you say, contemporarily, would be right for the market in Santa Rosa?

**Delgado:** Unfortunately here in Santa Rosa, what’s right for the market is these service industries, but there’s also people who drive trucks for the railroad, there’s people who work at corrections, there’s farmers, there’s ranchers, there’s of course all of the other people that service our gas, water, electric, all of those are needed.

**DD:** If someone were to start a new business, call you on the phone and say “I want to move up there and start a new business on your glorious Route 66. What business has the best chance of succeeding?” What would you tell them?

**Delgado:** I’m not advocating this, but I wouldn’t be willing to block something like this; but I think one of these Wal-Marts, not a “Super,” would do very well with this interstate 40 traffic route side of Santa Rosa, I mean right on that east side up there. It’s not good for the community in general, and it’s not good for a lot of these small businesses but unfortunately in Santa Rosa, we’ve already lost a lot of the small retail anyway, because our local people drive out of town already. So in our case it may not hurt that much. We could lose Santa Rosa Lumber and maybe the grocery store, so there’s give and take in everything but Wal-Mart in general is not good, so again I’m not advocating that.

When we were a Main Street community we looked at a lot of different things. Our idea back then was to do sort of, not so much an incubator in the technical sense, but more of retail incubator, for somebody who wanted to make a go of an antique shop or an art gallery. I think an art gallery or antique shop would do well in the right location. We had some people come in from Las Vegas and they did locate on the highway but there was no parking, and if you don’t have parking you can’t do too much.

**DD:** Why would they do that with no parking?

**Delgado:** It was the weirdest thing. I don’t know. There’s a soap opera actress, Tanya Williams, she bought property over here, it’s the old hotel. Now it’s very nice that she bought the old hotel and put some money into it (it’s a money pit), but when she came to Santa Rosa and was investigating Santa Rosa, she didn’t come to me. If she would have come to me I would have set her in the right direction. She went to another guy, but unfortunately the other guy had designs on buying that Lake City Diner over there, him

and his wife, so instead of leading her to where he should have led her, he led her to somewhere else. I think if people go to the right people in the community and they're really interested in starting a business, there are people in the community that say "You know what, here's a good opportunity for you." There was a Kentucky Fried Chicken at the top of the hill and it's like anything else, when they were getting ready to open that place up, the established ma-and-pas--Silver Moon, Santa Fe Grill, Joseph's, Sand, Comet--they're not really happy because you only have a certain [amount of] pie, but at the same time establishments like that can bring their own sort of marketing. Someone will see the billboard out on the highway and say "Oh I feel like eating chicken, that's what I want." Now they're closed. Someone will ask "How can you go wrong selling fried chicken?" and the answer to that is, like I said earlier, he had an absentee owner, out of Cottonwood Arizona, and he had some managers and as good as they tried, they could not hold down that fort.

**DD:** Is there also some kind of tension between those businesses that are local and those which come in from the outside with local people favoring local people, as opposed to favoring the Kentucky Fried Chickens?

**Delgado:** I always take those type of things as a rumor almost. It's possible but no, I think the market always determines what people are going to do. It's a choice and people are going to do what they're going to do and spend their money where they want to and you can't tell them where to spend it.

**DD:** No, but depending on the opportunities that are open there.

**Delgado:** Just like anything else, some of these young people that you put to work for you, and again if you're not watching your front door and your drive up window, I don't really think young people really think of it as stealing, but for my daughters we told them "Don't ever give food away, that is stealing." That's kind of the cool thing to do, you know you make better friends like that.

I said "Don't do that you guys, that's not the way, it's not good for you." I have to say growing up, when the boss used to leave the restaurant, we'd throw a steak on the grill and sit down and have a big steak, so what do you do, you know? My dad used to say "You guys eat all the profit!" when we were in the stations and stuff.

**DD:** You were a Main Street community for a while. Tell me just a very little bit about that program in general and then how it worked, or didn't work for Santa Rosa.

**Delgado:** You know the Main Street organization and the experience and the resource that is Main Street is an excellent, one of the best opportunities we've had and we've tried to take hold of. It's unfortunate and I don't know where the attitude comes from, me as trying to do what I do and try to do it best, I was really disappointed that we weren't able to make a better go of it, have more people get involved, have more of the businesses actually join the organization. I think those attitudes start back in the day—forties, fifties, sixties--when the state of New Mexico and other states instituted lodger's

tax. Back then the City of Santa Rosa had very strong chamber of commerce and rotary club and so forth: civic organizations that saw that need and the business people of the community saw that need to organize and promote themselves and all that stuff. I think with the exception of lodger's tax, little by little, the business people start depending on the city. I don't know about other cities but I do know here in Santa Rosa, more and more, "Let the city do this, let the city do that, they have money, they have lodger's tax" and so that's that involvement. I think our Main Street didn't have the right involvement because they had already let the chamber go, it was "Oh here comes an organization, give me some money but leave me alone." So we had those type of people.

I think as far as the organization itself, we made a lot of headway, you know, we had some really neat projects that, not just as a direct result, but as Main Street as part of the equation and part of the team, and part of the preservation aspect, I think we did get some stuff done and are still in the process of getting more stuff done. I just think it was one of those things where even though there was a few of us that saw the opportunity, saw the resource and utilized the resource, just the community as a whole may have thought, "That's not going to do me any good." I don't know how else to describe it. The best example is, we were the first community to have façade squad here in New Mexico and I can show you pictures of the building right across the way right here and it was a mess. This whole massive roof was covered everywhere, it was just a mess. That's our downtown corner here and we did the façade squad and we had money from different directions that it came in and Main Street helped us with the design, with the sort of organization of the whole thing, making sure city council understood what was going on. When we finished that project, I really thought that the next few weeks I was going to have my phone ring off the hook that they wanted to become part of Main Street and if it was for no other reason, just to get their buildings fixed up. But we didn't get that and to me that was a little disappointing.

**DD:** What was the relation between Route 66 content and the Main Street program?

**Delgado:** Well, when we started the Main Street program, we still had retail businesses along pre-1937 Route 66, and back then I've always thought of this downtown area as our Main Street, being 4<sup>th</sup> Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Street, this block down here and then what I call "Bridge to Bridge." That essentially is our Main Street. Just like Bridge Street is over in Las Vegas, New Mexico. So, again, I really think that, because Route 66 was our original Main Street, well it was already our Main Street, then it became Route 66, then it was realigned again and it kind of dropped out. It was always an integral part of the community, so I think it's kind of cool that we've always been part of Route 66 and it of us.

**DD:** What I'm asking is, was Main Street selling Route 66...

**Delgado:** Yes it was always, a little part of that yes. Even just in the name itself, "Main Street America" it was always a part of Route 66. In fact, a lot of the improvements that you saw here downtown, that's our Route 66. You can't separate the two in Santa Rosa, maybe elsewhere you can, but you just can't here.



**DD:** I'm still curious to go back to the subject of you being a great eyewitness here, copying down all those license plates, and I so much wish we had that information because it would be very valuable data to compare now to then. You were collecting data but there probably was no way to preserve it. How would you say that the travelers down 66 differ today from then? What are the biggest differences?

**Delgado:** Number one, back then the travel was part of the adventure, it was so much more difficult for one thing, I think travelers back then were subject to the elements more so than you are today. Like I was saying earlier, you didn't spend two hours in a car. Especially in the summer, you had to get out of that car.

Today, I think that people are just more in a hurry. I think they enjoy the trip as part as what they are doing, but the destination is always the main part of their trip; so I think some people do enjoy the interim, the place to place, but I really think that the destination has become the main focus on their travel, and they're able to do more in less time, so that's probably one of the main differences. Back then it was families and now it's more of a nostalgic trip and the romanticizing of Route 66. There are young people, all travelers are tourists in the same way that they want to take in the whole community, the history, and the recreation, points of interest and attractions and so forth. I think everyone does that to some degree, but I think there is that traveler who wants to see that time. A friend of mine came in and I was after his brother some time back, John Murphey, who was doing an article on Two Lane Blacktop.

To my recollection some of that was filmed in Santa Rosa, but I didn't know for sure, but this friend of mine his brother who works at that Rio Pecos truck terminal, it's got the neon sign with the cowboy on it, he worked there in its last days. I could have sworn that they had filmed there. John was asking me about it. I was telling him that movie is so period that it's ridiculous, you walk into the parts store and it's like you walk into Chief Auto Parts back here and it could have been in there, I don't know.

But I think that there's a large group of people, they somehow hope that that's out there somewhere and they want to see that and Canadians and Europeans and these people from France, everything they hear about Route 66, that's what they're expecting. I think. That's why having a sort of place where there's this, what I call, a cathedral to Route 66, over there would be so cool, and that's that warehouse over there. I think people are looking for that. There's not going to be a lot of left and I think whatever you can give them and show them and let them experience, they'll do it.

**DD:** Do they stop for the same amount of time now? Is it just into the gas station and then out?

**Delgado:** You know, back in the day, I'll tell you because I worked in restaurants all of my life, breakfast was big time. Any restaurant guy along Route 66 will tell you that, all over the whole country. Anymore, breakfast has gone away. It's the franchise hotel serving continental breakfast. In that regard it has really changed, and that's part of the

time component. There's a bigger rush. We need to figure out a way to slow people down again.

How do we slow these people down? Some want to do it but others just won't. I'll tell you, it has really hurt, I've even looked into how we would create an ordinance where no franchise could serve a continental breakfast.

**DD:** That doesn't sound likely.

**Delgado:** No, it's not likely at all. I looked at every single way. I even told my lodger's tax guy, "You know, we spend \$5000 - \$6000 a pop over here, let's create coupons for people who go into the motels to go into the restaurants," because when they go into the restaurants they eat, they tip, they buy gifts, they buy all of this.

**DD:** That's a smart idea.

**Delgado:** Well we need to do something. We can't not do something. I just hate to see us spending money on stuff. My board makes really good decisions; they discuss everything very thoroughly but there's just some stuff that's just politically motivated.

**DD:** Well, let's take this new project. Here you have a classic Route 66 project. You have an old building, classy, distinguished, that someone wants to rehab and then emphasize its location on Route 66. Where will you find the funds to do that?

**Delgado:** We have found some funds. Here it's really hard when you start to apply for funding, you almost can't use the word museum, even though I've found a couple of opportunities for museums, there's not a lot of money. I think our best route to looking for additional funding is to use this idea of a retail incubator where we want to figure out a way to bring business, bring retail mix back into downtown Santa Rosa, that's where we've had some success with SBA. We have yet to spend all of that money. As far as HPD and the environmental department, we're passed all of those hurdles, as far as phase one. So we're essentially 'shovel ready' as they say. I've been working with our congressional delegation because SBA's camp is just part of our whole budget, you know, Washington. As of tomorrow I'll have real good answers to "Hey look we're going to start drawing down this money." \$170,000 is not going to take us really far in that building because of electrical codes, fire and so forth. But we're going to do the best we can with that. I think there is funding out there. One of the things that's happening with us is we've had some changes, as far as priorities. One of the reasons this fish production facility became our main priority is because that would allow the city to gain some revenues to actually have an export product and now the city wouldn't run it but it would be a city owned facility.

**DD:** Did you say "fish"?

**Delgado:** Fish production for trout and warm water fish. Using ground water and lake water.

**DD:** Is that moving forward?

**Delgado:** Yes it is.

**DD:** So there's a company that's investing the money in putting up the...

**Delgado:** There's a couple of companies interested and as soon as we get the feasibility study done and we are able to start pulling some money in here, we will go to RFP (Request for Proposals) and try to get a private operator for that. Through our lead up act already we have a city building out here, it's just a living facility, I think it's the only one owned by a city in New Mexico. It's leased out to a private operator, so along the same lines. The fish production facility would really help; especially with projects like this because one of our biggest problems right now is that we don't have matching money. Any time you look for even grants and stuff, even USDA or whatever, you need to have that, in most cases 50%. If you don't have the money, you know scenic byways is 25% or 20% and we've been taking advantage of scenic byways money, there's not a lot of money there and this last time around they didn't give us much of a head start. We're looking at two projects and one would be over Park Lake, which is over on Stark Register, and that's on pre-1937. There used to be buildings there and now there's only one of those old historic buildings left, it's a stone building. I don't think the city back in those days, the seventies, really contacted HPD before they did anything with that. Going back to this facility, it would really help to stabilize our city operating budget, I think, it would really help us with these type of projects. Now that's down the road, but that's our biggest obstacle right now, we can find opportunities, but you need to invest in the stuff and the way things have been in the last couple of years, it's been tough.

**DD:** The next generation coming up, the ones graduating high school forty years after you, do you feel that they have an understanding of Route 66 and that they would be the kind of generation that would support municipal expenses in this direction?

**Delgado:** (Laughs) Yeah! I think I might have thought about that at one time but I think the answer is that they're surprisingly... I've had some individuals that I've talked to that seem to have an interest and even an understanding in Route 66 but I would have to honestly have to say that they would go to these entertaining... There's always a historic interest of course, but I'm wondering about someone carrying a torch so to speak. Just human nature being what it is, there's always going to be somebody who's going to have this, someone will inspire them or something will happen where they say "You know what, that's what I want to do and that's what I think is important." We might be surprised but that's a hard question to answer.

**DD:** Well let me just share with you what some other communities on Route 66 are doing in that direction:

One key element is always going to be your high school English and History teachers, whether they are interested in producing oral history projects in the community where they assign the students to do an interview and to do the research that goes with that

interview and put together a nice little end-of-the-year notebook with pictures and then tap into the resources that are out there, which would even include my office, the Route 66 association of the state and stuff like that. Getting into a regular rotation, an English paper on Route 66, you know stories you've collected, history papers on Route 66, then the local public library could help, because they go in there to pick up their videos. But I've just had the experience of going to four places in the library trying to find stuff on Route 66. If there was a display corner on Route 66, with a photograph of Santa Rosa in the old days and you just literally lifted the books and put them together in one place and put Route 66 on it...

I asked the librarian and she said "Oh people come in here all the time looking for this stuff on Route 66." I said, "let's not make them work too hard to find these materials."

These are some things that people are trying to coordinate to raise a consciousness in the community and then sometimes there's some annual event that really is an annual event, a Route 66 pie bake off, a Route 66 parade, these kinds of things that are built into the calendar here in a small town that would draw the tourists, but they have another ancillary effect of building pride into the next generation—

Without which I suppose there might be a challenge to people coming down the line. Do you worry at all about that? You're not at all ready for retirement but will the next round of people, the next cohort behind you, will they understand what Route 66 means to the town?

**Delgado:** Again, that question, I don't know. I keep on, not because I want to relay that to you, but just my belief that it's just got to be that person, that business owner that has that stake in things and keeps things running. Is someone going to come down that line and, say, purchase the Phillips 66 over there, which is important to our Route 66, and is somebody going to come along and do that. I don't know and with the question being put to me, I'd almost say no.

The biggest obstacle right now to newer businesses and newer people getting into business here in Santa Rosa (and I'm sure its similar in other communities) we have this downtown and we have these lots and business lots and commercial buildings that are out on the highway, some are operating and some are empty. The leases on these buildings are out of this world. How does a person, a new business person, lease a building, pay their own salary, pay for a worker, pay insurances. I argue with this all the time but our city of Santa Rosa is restrictive in its startup costs. We don't have a tier of types of businesses. The guy that has just a little video store is paying just the same amount as for a sewer line and a water line as the guy that has a restaurant with 300 people going into it every day. It doesn't make sense. We've got to be more business friendly.

How Route 66 is going to be preserved with this--not standard of living, but this standard that's been set--it's not the same standard as when it came to be what it was. How is the new generation going to be able to carry that on? Most of the people that I know here in

Santa Rosa worked their way up the ranks and that's why they run the businesses that they run and I'm not seeing too much of that.

**DD:** You mean people are just, either leaving...

**Delgado:** They're leaving. I think this whole resiliency of just being human, there's always going to be somebody who is going to have that desire. I wonder now. Maybe I didn't before but now I do.

**DD:** I think it's an issue across Route 66 and there seems to be a lot of ways that people are responding to it. Some people call this "Founders Disease." You know a great organization comes along with a charismatic individual and then that person dies, gets old... Have they set up a cohort to follow them?

**Delgado:** Yes.

**DD:** Have they instilled this sense of historicity (if that's not too fancy of a word) to allow people to recognize that it isn't just this building that's over there, but it's the sense that this is what linked Santa Rosa to the rest of the world.

**Delgado:** I agree with you 100%. What you're saying, it's not so much as I need a secretary, I'm not going to be here forever, we need someone in here now to pick up this stuff and do this stuff and that's just not me, that's everyone. I'm not picking on Joseph, but we'll use Joseph for example. His family and so forth, I know him and his sisters and they all grew up working in a restaurant, and his kids worked in the restaurant to some degree but they're not there any more. Are they going to come back and run that restaurant like he is? I don't know. And then what'll happen to it at that point? From the museum of New Mexico, there was a traveling van, when they came and parked at the library, there was a bunch of kids in there. It's really neat because the library gets kids anyway, you know they come in after school, but I think there were more kids that day; they might have done an announcement at school. I think there is an opportunity.