

Nikki Squire
superintendent
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Maribel Arciga-- The following interview was conducted on behalf of the Oral History Program at Century High School. The interviewee is Nikki Squire, the interviewer is Maribel Arciga. This took place on Friday May 30th at approximately 9 o'clock. 31st. ok.

So, I'm going to begin with ... what was your first involvement with Century High School?

Nikki Squire-- My first involvement was on the original planning that took place before the first bond measure was put up. And at that time I was the assistant super intendant of the school district for curriculum and instruction. And, in that role I was asked to participate on the team that was putting together the educational program planning for the school. Which was the first step of designing any school. What do we want the educational program to look like? And then the building design comes around that. So, I was on that original committee and then was involved from that time until the second proposal was passed and the school was built.

MA-- How do you see your role as a super intendant in helping CHS to succeed?

NS-- Well, the super intendant role involved a variety of responsibilities. In the early phases, a role that I had was to listen to teachers and other school people, administrators, counselors, people who would be working at the school and to students and parents and community members about what they saw as a vision for the school. And then to help frame the proposal and the vision in a way that reflected that at a level that would enable us to gain support for the project. And then, I had a role as we were making the proposal, and doing the planning, I had a role that was kind of a combination of general leadership and cheerleader. I was the emissary for the vision of the school, to a variety of community groups, I was the emissary with faculty groups, for the overall vision of the school and for the logistics of getting it going. Because any time you start a new school, there are lots of processes that you have to go through that can be divisive if they don't happen well. With the design team on the second time around, when the proposal that did pass, by that time I was super intendant and my role there was to give parameters for the overall project and construction of the school. For example, when I gave the charge to the design team, one of the things I said was " We want this

school to last a century". That was before it was named. But we want a building that says to the young people and their teachers when they come in "This is an important place, this is a place where important work happens." So we wanted it to be, to look and feel grand, but we also had to be financially responsible. So it couldn't be perceived as a Taj Mahal. And, this may be getting ahead of where you want us to be, but as I walk into Century, that is an example of the kind of general visions that I did, that I see reflected in the school.

MA-- So, when you talked about people's different ideas that they thought Century should be, was there a lot of difference, or did most of the people want the same thing?

NS-- Well, there were some things on which there was a very wide spread agreement, and of course those would be characteristics that were folded into the planning. Then there were some things that were different, not so much as controversy, but just different perspectives. But the kind of expertise of the people who are science teachers bring to bear is different from the kind of expertise of those who are knowledgeable about computers, or those who are teachers of a variety. There were people who's main expertise had to do with teaching and learning, and people who's main expertise had to do with how to get and HPAC system that works, you know. So, partly it's a matter of creating processes where those various kinds of technical expertise can come together in a coherent whole. So that the architects and construction people could work. and then there's all the technical work that gets done. How do you get the money? How do you get the contractor? How do you do everything, you know that needs to be done within the law? And, how do you see to it that the project moves along on the planned time schedule, within the financial constraints that you have?

MA-- So, what would you say that was the most difficult decision that was made that people weren't agreeing on?

NS-- I think there were two areas in which we had more controversy than what we would've liked. One was the setting of the attendance boundaries. And that was predictably contraversial. We worked very hard at involving people from every corner of the school district. And we did involve people from every corner of the school district. The team had a representative from every single elementary attendance area. But,

ultimately, you know, there were going to be some people who wanted to be one place that were going to be another. You can't make everybody happy in a situation like that because we had to, you know, balance the population in the schools. And, so that was hard. We ended up with folks in the Century geographic area that weren't in the attendance area south of the highway, and they wanted to be here. So, they were not happy. We were able to pull them into continued planning. And I think in the case of many of them, you know, they continued to be friends of the school district although to this day there are those who don't agree with how we did the boundaries. The other area where we experienced some difficulty was in staff assignments. And, there again, we worked hard at a really open process, a process where everybody who was interested in coming to the new school had an opportunity to apply, where everybody who did not want to be transferred from the place where they were had an opportunity to say that. And our first priority was to accommodate people's wishes. Because we really believe that people do their best work if they're working in an environment that they want to be in. But, again, you know, we had so many teachers and so many students, and all of this was done in a time where funding for schools was tight. And, so we did have a few people that got assignments, or didn't get assignments, that they wanted. That actually was a little more easy to resolve than the one with the parents because as professionals, even though folks don't always get what they want, they understand the reasons. Whereas sometimes, if you're on the outside looking in, you just, you don't get it in terms of "well, gee why couldn't that have gone my way?".

MA-- Back to the boundary issue, a lot of parents were saying, the Butternut Creek, especially the parents that lived around there, were saying that it was because they were upper-middle class, and so, would you say that it depended on making this a balanced school?

NS-- One of the considerations of a list of about nine that we had for the committee to work with, was to, as closely as they could, maintain a kind of equity among the three high schools in terms of the socio-economic makeup of the school. That was not, although I know the people of Butternut Creek believe that, that was not the telling factor there. The telling factor there was TV Highway. And, we needed to keep a population at Hil-Hi, even as it turned out, Hil-Hi remains the smallest school in the district in terms of student population. But we needed to keep a

population at Hil-Hi, we needed to leave enough room at Hil-Hi for expected growth in the South Urban Reserves. But if we had brought that area, Butternut Creek and the other areas South of TV Highway, into Century, then it would have made for absolutely antenable(?) bus and walking routes for kids that would've, could've gone to Hil-Hi. So, it was a safety issue, it was a transportation issue, and ultimately, it was kind of a combination of all of the factors. The folks there focused on that, and I understand why they did, but that wasn't sole criteria.

MA-- So, off the boundary issue, what are some of your best memories regarding Century and the project?

NS-- The whole planning process was extremely interesting and fun. It's always wonderful to be involved in starting from scratch and envisioning what a school could be. So, I enjoyed that. I really felt like we succeeded with this school. It was the first time in a very long time that, it was then the Hillsboro Union(?) High District, that we had passed a sizable bond, we got a good majority for it. The school was built on time, on budget, and it was as what we wanted it to be. It's a beautiful place. So, I was happy about that. I thought Century High School opened very successfully. The original staff, it continues to be a great place, but most people don't realize, I think, how hard it is to open a new school successfully. There are many examples in Oregon, of schools that were beautiful schools that, Adams High School for example, never really got off the ground. Ended up closing it and turning it into a middle school, Portland did that. Aloha High just down the road. My husband was the principal there for a number of years, he went there when it was 18 months old and he was the third principal in there. It had a very difficult opening. So, people have just assumed that because a school is new "gee, this is easy" and it's not. So, I felt that Mr. Barnekoff and the original staff who opened this school, did a superior job of getting it off to a good start. And I was proud of that. I have like the continued good relationships among the three high schools. There was a lot of concern about that, and you know there's always a little bit of rivalry, but it's been healthy rivalry, that Century kids were willing to share their auditorium with Hil-Hi kids before the auditorium was finished over there. So, I have had a really good feeling about the results.

MA-- What's something in particular that you really enjoyed or that you really remember?

NS-- Well, it's hard to think of one thing. You know, I really enjoyed the education. I enjoyed the first time I came to a fine arts performance here. I enjoyed the very first day that I visited the school after it was in session. And, I mean I'll never forget that day. Seeing all the young people and you know, schooling happening here. That's probably the best memory I have.

MA-- How do you feel about this, how did you feel when you were first involved with it? And how did you feel at the end of it? Do you feel like you met the goals that were met?

NS-- I do. You know, there are always a few things that, you know, with hind sight, you look back and say "gosh, you know, we could've done this" or "why didn't we think of that?". But for the most part I feel very satisfied with the results that we've got. I think the fact that Century was a successfully design constructed and open as it was, is what enabled us to get community support for two other big bond measures since then. One of them, to take care of the things at Hil-Hi and Glencoe and the elementaries that had been part of the first proposal for Century and that we took out, you know, the second time. And then the one that's building Liberty and the other elementary schools that are being built right now. Because if you don't do a good job when people entrust you with money, then the next time you go out and ask they say "nuh uh, we're not gonna do that".

MA-- So, what was your vision of Hil-Hi, I mean Century?

NS-- Well, my vision, I don't think was, I'm not even sure I can remember the parts of the final design that were initially my idea. I was, you know, I was very stuck on, you know as I told you earlier, on the idea that it needed to be a school that really in its structure and design communicated the importance of learning. And accomadated that. I had strong feelings about the need for us to design it in a way that could be broken into smaller communities of learning. Because, you know, by all the research, a 2000 puple high school is too big. And we all know that. But, it's expensive to build and operate separate schools. And much more expensive. And we weren't in a position to build four schools of 500 students. But we were in a position to design Century in a way that talented staff could create smaller communities of learning in the school. And so that was one of the things. I wanted it to be built of materials that were lower maintenance, you know, I didn't want us to have to spend the

amount of money that we were having to spend on some of our other schools because they weren't well built to begin with. So I wanted us to build for that kind of economy. And I also wanted it to be a place that respected students as learners. I thought, for example, we could have study areas scattered around the school where students could gather and study. That we didn't have to have just one place that, you know, that could be supervised by a small team all the time. I'm not naive about whether there aren't a few people, of any age, in a group, whether you're talking about adults downtown or students at school, you know there are always a few people that aren't responsible. But, I didn't want us to build the school with the idea of controlling the few miscreants. I wanted us to build a school that in all ways communicated to the students our respect for them as learners and then figure out other ways to take care of the few that maybe wouldn't participate in that idea. So, those are some things that come to mind.

MA-- And, how do you view an entrance in a school?

NS-- Well, Mr. Barnekoff used to call the clock tower the "Squire Clock". And, or "Nikki's Clock" he would call it. And the reason for that was when I talked with the group about one of the ways to communicate to students and staff, important things happen here, this is an important place. I talked about the degree to which a grand entry can do that. And I gave examples of other buildings where, you know, from the Lincoln Memorial to some other high schools or, you know, the big library town, where just walking in the place made you feel like you ought to attend to the business that is going on there. It just creates a feeling in you. So, I had said to the design team and architects, to the degree that we can do that with the entry, I think that would be a nice part of the design. And the original, the first draft I guess you would say of the design, the clock tower was much grander than it is. It's still pretty nice, but it was too expensive. So, but I think they did a nice job of creating an entry. I mean don't you feel that way when you come to school here. "Wow, I'm at school. This isn't the mall." And, by the way, it was a time when a lot of schools, new schools that were being built didn't look much different than a shopping mall. So, we rejected some initial designs that had that feeling, that you were walking into a movie theater, or a mall, yea no, this is a school.

MA-- Ok, let's see. What have been the barriers to achieving

goals of the vision of Century High School?

NS-- I think the main barrier, you know, let me first say I think a good deal of the vision of the school has been achieved and continues to be achieved. If there have been barriers, I would say they have been primarily financial. As a product of the current situation of school finance in Oregon. I don't think there's been any lack of vision or effort on the part of staff or students. Nor do I think that there's been any lack of support for that vision. From a people stand point in the school district. I just think that scarce resources force decisions that nobody likes to make. And that always hampers moving forward with any vision.

MA-- So, let's see. I've asked all these scattered around. Who were the key people involved in making Century happen?

NS-- Gosh, it would be hard to name names and not worry about leaving people out. I would say that the original people that worked on the design team for the school, the school board that was in place at that time because it was kind of conventional wisdom that we couldn't get a bond passed for this amount. Mr. Barnekoff and the original planning team that he put together, which was a representative from every academic department in the school, and the librarian and a counselor and representatives of all parts of the school. The students. There were student representatives on all the planning teams. I think the original, talking about getting started now, I mean I think everyone is important to the life of the school. But I think the original leadership group, student leadership group, I think they just did a great job. So, you know there were some key staff and students. There were a corp of parents who came together to help Mr. Barnekoff and the faculty planning team before the school ever opened. And they were important. We had good support from the business community in Hillsboro for this school and particularly from Intel and other high-tech people to help us get the technology in here that we wanted and help us get it functioning.

MA-- Did you choose any of these people? And what were your criteria and how did you evaluate the staff?

NS-- I chose Mr. Barnekoff to be the planning principal for the school. And then he was the person who chose the other planning team members and that's a belief system I have about, you know, if you ask someone to

do a hard job, you give them the authority to make choices. And he's a very collaborative person, so it isn't like he went into a cave and did that by himself. But I chose Mr. Barnekoff and my criteria for choosing him were things that I knew about him. I had worked with him as a colleague, we were both vice principals at Glencoe High School. I had worked with him as a fellow principal. We were both principals in the school district at the same time. I had worked with him as his supervisor when I was superintendant and he was principal at Hil-Hi. And I just had tremendous respect for him as a people person, as a judge of good qualities in teachers, as a person who understood sound schooling and how to lead a school in a way that would be a healthy place for everybody involved. He was my key selection. I chose some other people in the district level to be his main contacts and support for various aspects. The person who was the maintenance and facilities people. I was very much involved in choosing the architectural firm.

MA-- How did you go upon with the choosing of the architecture? Did you see the work they had done before?

NS-- Yes, we had a process where we invited firms to apply and we reviewed their other work and their criteria. And this firm, the firm that built Century, was actually elected to be the firm from when we had the first bond proposal up. Then the construction people, the general contractor, was also chosen through a selection process. It wasn't a situation where I was the sole person, but I put together the teams of people that did the reviews and brought the recommendations to me and made the recommendation to the board.

MA-- We understand that the original bond measure to pay for Century was defeated and cuts had to be made, what was eliminated from the school?

NS-- Nothing was eliminated from Century High. As a matter of fact the second bond measure actually had more in it, by way of equipping the school, than the first one. What we did was, the original bond measure had the proposal for Century, and it also had a substantial amount in it for adding on and updating both Glencoe and Hil-Hi. And we eliminated those parts of the bond in order to get the Century bond to pass. That was another area, you know you asked me a question about controversy, that particularly the people at Hil-Hi, were so disappointed that we did that.

They had waited a long time. But I was convinced that we would have better luck with the voters if what we were doing was getting the new high school built and then going back and making the case on its own merit for what we needed to do for Century [supposed to be Hil-Hi] and Glencoe. And in fact it worked. We got this bond passed and then we went back and got a bond passed to do what we needed to do at Hil-Hi and at Glencoe, Glencoe's was less extensive than Hil-Hi's. And also to do some other maintenance. And we got that passed. So there was a delay in there and for all understandable reasons the people at Hil-Hi were not happy with us about that. But it was the strategy, I was convinced, and you know not just by intuitive measures, we had gathered some information about what the voters, why the voters had defeated the first one and we would get to go on a track that would be successful. And I feel good about that. It wasn't real fun at the time, because I live in the Hil-Hi attendance area and my daughter's a Hil-Hi alumni. It was not only as superintendant, but my neighbors and friends, and my daughter's friends, were all over me about that. But nothing was eliminated from the Century High School project. In fact the Century High School project was enhanced. So, if there's some perception at Century that this school got shorted on that deal, it's not true.

MA-- Yea, there was when, I think, one of the interviewees that came said that the gym was going to be bigger, because of the cuts it had to be stacked on top of each other and cut smaller.

NS-- No, that design decision was made because of the size of the property here. During the design process we realized, the initial idea was that, was not for stacked gyms, but we realized if we put that big of a footprint, there wouldn't be any playing fields. And so there was at one time, there was a plan to go ahead and do that and then use the playing fields over at Brown, you know there's a lot of property over there, as the home field for Century. But you know we've been bussing kids from Hil-Hi over to Harefield for football and track for so many years and it's very inconvenient for the kids. So, we stepped back and said how do we get the space we need and still be able to do most of the outside things right there at home so the kids don't have to do that? Then during the construction process itself, as always happens, you know you get into a situation where you get some cost overruns or whatever and you make little adjustments along the way. And the one thing that happened during that process, that I recall, was that we took out, I think, a classroom in

each of the four quads. No, we took out an additional lab and it became a classroom. So we had to downgrade a little bit on the equipping part. But that wasn't as a result of the bond, that was as a result of costs and estimates and so forth as we moved through the project.

MA-- Is there anything at all that you think was left unsaid that you would like to talk about?

NS-- No, except maybe one thing. Since this is an oral history project, and I think the reason for that is, you know the saying, "If we don't understand history, we're doomed to repeat it." I would hope that one of the outcomes of this project would be, to keep alive at Century High, with the students who come, now come along after the school was built, keep alive in their minds the amount of care and love and dreaming for them that went into this place, on the part of not just staff members and people like me, but community members and their parents and everybody who was willing to step up and pay for this place, and that they would continue to care for the school and take good care of it at that same level. Because school financing is getting harder, not easier. There isn't a lot of money to put into maintaining places and to the degree that the students and staff can continue to be a force to keep it nice, to do everything they can do to minimize damage and careless use. That would be a reward to the people that worked hard to see to it that it came to be.

MA-- Alright.