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KEITH ALLEN

The following interview was conducted on behalf of the Century Highschool museum project.

The interviewee is Keith Allen; The interviewers are Moses Mendoza and Josh Merrick. The interview was conducted at Century high school at 12:15 on Tuesday may 28.

What was your first involvement in the planning of Century High school?

Phil Barnekoff called me, ^{start here} Phil Barnekoff and Stan Miller got a hold of me and said we need some input for designing a 21st century publications facility at the new school. So I said ok, and I met with them and another guy named Don Domes from Hilhi. And we met at the district office and basically don and I had some ideas and sketches. His some of his ideas were a little different than mine, but we were pretty much on the same page. The-we gave em some basic sketches, and pretty much assumed that that would be the end of the involvement that we had, that somehow we'd given our input and now they're gonna go do whatever they wanna do. Well then they called us about a month later and they said, maybe two months later- you want to come back and see some preliminary sketches of the school- sure. I thought well- I've never, as a teacher, I've never been used to having anybody take my ideas seriously you know. So we went in and we looked at them, and it was like hey- these ideas from this facility are just like ours, except the architecture- the lines are straight. Hey that's pretty amazing. Well what did you expect, that's what we got your input for. And I was like well I just expected you to take our input and do whatever you damn well please, but that's what I thought- that's the way administration generally works, they take the teacher input, and then we'll do what we want- and then we say well you got input. And they say well Century's not really going to be that type of school and we're going to really listen to teachers. And that was for me, the beginning of my wanting to come here as a teacher it was like wow, it they're going to listen to us, then that's a good school.

Greg M.

What other schools have you been involved with?

Glencoe and Thomas.

And how would you compare those schools to Century?

Thomas was old, an old building. But in some ways there was more similarities between Thomas and Century than Glencoe and Century. For one thing Thomas had windows that opened, you got fresh air, I was sick a lot at Glencoe, because I believe the indoor air system, and you really didn't have much opportunity to get fresh air into the school. Glencoe always tested their air and said oh, it can't be that, its gotta be something else. But as soon as I started going to Century I have hardly used a sick day since being here. Glencoe was a good school, but it was really bound up by the Glencoe way of doing things, and it didn't allow for a whole lot of change, or if you had other ideas you could present those ideas, but they generally wouldn't go terrible far, I didn't feel at least. Century and Thomas were more, the schools felt younger at heart. Thomas was more open- you could try new things and do new things, and I feel like that at Century too. At Glencoe I felt a little bit constrained by the Glencoe way of doing things.

What were the big dilemmas and big problems you faced when you were planning or when you were on the planning team?

We spent a lot of time talking about the whole concept of going to blocking, and going to smaller communities of learning within the school, and thinking about those aspects of things. It wasn't really a dilemma, because we pretty much were sure we wanted to do it, but we weren't sure how it was gonna happen. And just saying that you want to do it doesn't make it so. There were some dilemmas, there were construction dilemmas, they couldn't put a full orchestra pit in the auditorium because it was ground water table was too high and it started turning into a swimming pool. So they had to cut down on that. The issue of the drop in the school, you know, that that wasn't originally planned, but it cost too much to grade out the lot. People talked about that stuff with you already a little but? That initial drop wasn't in the initial plans, it was going to be, the lot was going to be flat graded out, but that didn't work out. Um. Some changes in the construction of this room, that just got costed out, that they thought were too expensive, but nothing really huge.

What are some specifics?

Oh, cable troughs, we were going to have troughs in the floor in the studio, so that you could, if you were running cabling you could drop it, have your device running near a trough and the troughs would run like a cross ways in the floor, then you would drop the cable down in the trough and then it would come up somewhere else, so there wouldn't be a big cord laying across the floor for someone to trip over and that was seen as too expensive. The lighting grid, originally there was supposed to be a lighting grid with dimmers and things like that, and that was costed out. Some of the space, the room was made a little smaller due to some cost concerns. Which now we're looking around for new space for the room, because we're bursting at the seams, particularly with this room, there's enough enrollment next year to fill ten sections, ten point five sections, and we only have eight in the room. At the point it seemed like the size made sense.

Along with some of those challenges, what were some big successes, or things that you were really happy with when Century opened.

During the planning itself, or just over all, during the last five years?

During the planning, and then maybe as you see some of these things come together as your teaching here

Well, I was really pleased that they agreed the concept of this of this room, to have all the publications in one room, to have televisions, dark room, photography, newspaper, yearbook. Everything at one facility, I think has contributed to the overall creativity and quality of the productions, so we're not little separate groups, all over the school, but we sort of work off, work with each other and off each other. Having the computers and the scanners, and all the things that you have here that make the program able to be special in

what we do, that's a huge success, and that they agreed to that, up front, without a clear idea of how it was all going to come together and the people that were signing the checks didn't really understand what I was talking about, they just said, we trust you to do it, that kind of thing, and that was a big success, the planning team was really a creative, fun group of people and it was really cool to be on it, and just to be involved in the —every aspect, from color choices to you know all that kinda stuff.

What was the initial vision of Century High School, at least in this department that you were coordinating?

Well, the vision I had was what we're doing today. In terms of this room right here we've realized that that maybe surpassed my vision of being able to have- like I don't know if I envisioned daily television news, but we have that, I certainly did envision radio, but we have that, that came later actually. I envisioned growth in the department, in terms of enrollment, getting more teachers, more fte dedicated to the area, quite honestly numbers and selection of courses, that makes a difference in terms of how much, how seriously people take what your doing and how much consideration people give you when you ask for money or things that you need for your program, if your struggling with just a few people in your program, and putting out a shlucked product, and you say I need 5000 more dollars, pffffff. But when I say now, they don't go pffff, they still usually say no, but they go, boy if we had it, you'd be the people we give it to. So it's a little different position to be in, than just being seen as the odd person out. Is that it? Is that what your question was?

What were the barriers, what have been the barriers to realizing the vision?

Space, Just not having enough of it, sometimes money, although we've got pretty much what we need, technology not always working the way you think it should. In the beginning there was a lot of issue with scanners and skuzzy cards, and a lot of things like that, but eventually that stuff turned out to be not even us, that was kinda interesting. WE actually worked on it like it was our problem, and Dave Parker put a lot of time in on that problem, and so did Mike Hall, but it turns out the real problem was the software, the version of software that was coming from the company that sold us the scanners, and the next version that came out, when they moved from sprint scan core to polar color insight, I think that's the name, all the problems that we were having disappeared. But was good about that was that we tried to solve the problem like it depended on us, so it actually made us smarter, and made our machines more efficient, than if we'd just kinda gone "we don't know what's wrong I guess it all just has to suck" we did solve the problem sort of, it was kinda like every third scan, the scanner would err out, every third or fourth scan, so you had to shut the whole machine down, reboot the machine, you know. WE don't have any problems like that any more, the scanners rarely err out any more. And it's the same machine, so it's the software, things like that. So those were always issues, the tech support at times has been really good, at other times its been kinda slow, so that can be issue. They've tried to move more of it into my control which has been good in some ways but the problem is I've got a full load of classes to teach, so any time I've gotta take time to take down several machines and get'm working right again, is time I have to take

barriers

away from class and helping students. A bigger dark room would have been smarter to put in, if I'd thought we had 208 people signed up for photography next year. If I thought we were going to end up with that many people I would have built a bigger dark room. And there really is no place to put any more dark room, quite honestly, unless we got rid of this closet here and maybe had the darkroom door right there, instead of...that might do it, but I don't think that's going to happen any time in the near future. So not planning, as much for growth as we should have probably has been a barrier.

What advice would you give to the liberty planning team in building their school?
As far as concerning your experiences and so forth.

Stay away from built ins, when your building your labs and so on, we did that right here, by not taking- built ins look nicer, like westview had these-I go into their publications room for example, they had their area that you kinda take a stem up to it, and then they have this room, like a side nook, with counters built in all the way around, where they have the computers on it, its really attractive, I mean it was when I went in there a lone time ago, but we went away from prefabricated spaces, we said who's to say that space is gonna be used that way in 5 or 6 or 7 years, I mean one of the rules we kinda followed was, I don't remember anybody saying this directly, but I actually remember hearing this when I used to work for a newspaper, they were Tigard, I covered Tigard district, they were building Tualatin High School, maybe at that time I think, and I remember hearing this designer who said that every decision you probably make will seem wrong in five years, make sure you make decisions that give you a lot of flexibility, so I think to decide to make decisions with change and flexibility in mind and keep things real flexible, multi use spaces, don't put in a lot of stuff that can't- like we chose to put in posts for our cord drops, rather than floor, because floor power or drops dictate where the computers will always be, whereas poles can be pulled and dropped down in other places you know, or just pulled up completely and not even have em. Also another piece of advice, I don't know, they've probably done this, they've done this already I really don't know but, I think you have to plan, somewhat, your schools programs, more around people than facilities. Cause I think one of the big mistakes is to build a big facility for something that you have no concept of who would be able to use it or do anything with it, and I think that's where Phil, when he helped put staff together, where he really excelled was he picked people and then let the people dictate the program, and the needs for the facility rather decided upon a program and then said where can I find people for this, cause I know that at some schools there's been schools that have come here and have looked at what we have and said well we want something just like this, and then they'll go buy a bunch stuff and make it, but then it'll turn out they really don't have anybody on staff who really knows about any of those things to make use of them the way they really should be, and so I think its real important- but then people say well people change, so shouldn't you build facilities and programs...but its sometimes to hard to find- people are a harder resource to find than halls and doors and computer. Having the right people to do things I think is very important.

How did Century's morning announcement system come about?

Well, it was planned from the very get go pretty much, I mean the video retrieval system and the-

(Interruption)

-yeah it was pretty much planned from the get go. The one good thing that Phil, again Phil made some really good decisions, again was he said lets take a year, without running, expecting this thing to be up and running, lets give you a year. So he never gave me classes even in the beginning. And that was so smart. We had people that said "when are we gonna use all that stuff you've got all this money and your not even using it" and they said that, and I said well, Phil, Phil gave me a year to... I taught a full load of photography and electronic publishing, but there just was not a video class when we first started. And that was the smartest thing he could have done. I mean, if he's listening to this, It was like an inspired decision, whether he knows that or not, because what it allowed to happen was as I started teaching electronic publishing, I said well you know, come and see what I got in this room. Some kids would walk in and go "dude." I remember one kid, I won't name is name on tape, he said "dude I could really jack some of this stuff and make some money." Well its like ok, NOT on TV crew... I mean but kids who would see it they go "oh this is great, can I mess around with this you know" and so on, then we just started kinda slowly having people mess with things, and try different things, and then I think even the second year, I'm not sure if it was the second year cause jag TV started the 2nd year the school was open, the 1st year we had nothing, we didn't' even do anything. The 2nd year Phil said, why don't' you try to get a club together or a group kinda do a video club, and that's what we did, and we actually ran jag TV for a year, started in January of that year without a class, it was just a program in the morning and afternoon that we worked on, and then the following the year, that's when we announced the class, that march.

Phil

How did you solve the communications lab's theft problems?

Oh, well, the funny thing was that- well, I don't know if they've- they've only been solved temporarily- we're putting up a locking cage system in the studio room, and we had some thefts last year at the same time. Same kinds of things, nothing big, but there's a lot of things around here that are small that are also quite expensive, and they're the kind of things that just kinda, you know, you have something on your desk, like this microphone- well nobody's stolen a microphone- but you know someone just sees it and swoop, they're gone. Well this year, though, Suren, when I told the class about how you may steal something from a computer lab or from a lab, but the devil will come steal your soul, for stealing. Suren made these posters using photoshop, and they're really creepy, him looking down into the scanner with his hood, and then he did something with this glowing effect on his eyes, and he put them up all over. It says if your stealing from us I'm coming for you. And he looks like death or the devil you know, and the thefts actually stopped after he put these posters up. So I thought, well, gee, maybe that really does work, the devil or...

How would you describe the culture at Century High School?

Ok, we were just talking about this at lunch. I'm not sure if this is as true as it was when the school first opened. But I think its still true. Every institution sort of slows down a little bit, in its ability to be groundbreaking and new, but. The whole nature of an institution is to preserve itself. Institutions live to preserve the institution, that's what they do best. And that's I think, a really ugly thing, about institutions, and that's what I think Thomas Jefferson- I'm not trying to get to deep here- but that's what he was trying to get at when he talked about the necessity of having a voice of dissent among your electorate, that he made the statement- and miss Duyckinck'll probably scream because I know the quote is different from this, but something to the extent of that every regime needs a good revolution, to keep it- something like that- to keep it stirred up and moving, and that whole idea of not allowing the institution to become stagnant. Because then the institution just starts thinking more about, you know, pulling in the walls, and save ourselves and heck with everybody else. And I think Century is one school, in my opinion, that's avoided becoming institutional, in think we are slowly, we could slowly begin to creep in that direction, but enough things have happened, I think with Century, that keep us a little bit on I think on the cutting edge as a faculty. I think the whole thing this year, we're fighting against the imposition of trimesters, which of course was cast as the new wave, the new thing to do, blah blah blah blah, and we were being cast, by some people as being "oh look at Century they're sticks in the mud, they don't want to change" well, yeah we don't want to change because what we have, the block system that we have is a higher evolutionary system than trimesters. Trimesters would be going to trimesters, in my opinion would have been a step backward, not a step forward, the limitation. The only thing is trimesters are easier for adults to schedule. IT makes it easier for administration, and adults. I don't care about what's easy for, I don't live to make my job easy, I mean, I enjoy complexity and ambiguity, and things being different. And I think Century kind of keeps things stirred up a little more. And it think that's the strength of the culture. And um, at lunch, we were talking about John Wesley, was the guy who, he didn't really start the Methodist church, but he is considered the father of Methodism, and he came out the church of England. And one of the things that Wesley talked about was institutional, institutionality and the importance of what he called revival mechanisms within any institution, that you need to have, and he actual was the first to say that the institution is only valid in so far as it shelters splinter groups. And that's not the nature of an institution. The nature of an institution of to say they're different, they see things differently than the institution, we need to get rid of them, we need to marginalize them or neutralize their threat or else things will have to change. At Century we've instead said, "why don't you guys go off and come up with some ideas that'll change things up, change things around. And we've been much more open, and not as threatened by new thinking, and that's exciting to me. The only thing that's constant is change. Change is. And I think particularly now, in the year that we live in, golly, if you aren't adaptable to change, you might as well just crawl into a hole and die because I guarantee you that the world is going to continue to change faster and faster and faster all the time. So a culture of change, a culture of risk taking. The culture of Century is change. The things that I'm interested in. The things that I like about this school, and that's what I think is really strong about Century.

Challenges
Matt J

Culture
of
CHS

Right now, you've got ^{FAME} fame class. We know that the whole CAM program, when the school was being planned that was kinda part of the focus anyway. How has that been implemented, and how long you think before it'll really get up and running to where everybody knows about it and everybody's involved?

I think, I couldn't say that for sure. You know, CAM's can be really artificial. Because the nature of a cam is that serves as a central interest area for people. Well down here at this end of the building we've had a cam for a long time, and my kids have always been, Ann Abrams, and Pat Cochran and I, and Bill Johnson, drama, and stew, Jim Dunlop. We see the same kids all day long. They're already in a CAM. And some schools, they've been more aggressive about creating CAMS, because all they really do when they create a cam is they say, well, take one from column a, and one from column b, and two from column c, and you have a cam. And its just basically, uh, there isn't really any unified program. It's just taking some classes and then it's called a cam. Well kids already do that. I would venture a guess that down in the north end, that there are the kids who are taking the you know, programs, and so on, and they're probably some of the same kids who are in discreet math, they probably Clamed themselves down there, you know what I'm saying? I mean, I don't know where its all gonna end up. I'm not sure Cams are going to be around in a few years. How would this school, and the state legislature and the dept. of ed supposed to worry about Cams and cims, and all this stuff, when they've got a hundred billion, not a hundred billion, a billion dollar shortfall for next year. You know? I mean, I think that we're doing something, because, we knew we were doing it anyway, and so we just wanted to call it something, and get people credit for what they were already doing. And the only thing we added to ours that made it different was the block. The block class. Which, has not I don't mean, its only the first year, the jury's still out on that. I think one of the thing kids are saying is I can make CAM and just take humanities, I can make my own cam in art. And they can, for the most part. Yeah. With our CAM, I think kids are saying that we could CAM ourselves. I'll take Art 4, tech theater, Jag TV, and then humanities, and I don't need the block. Because the humanities block does take the extra period out of your schedule. But the benefit of it, of course, is people are having time, for example, the last few weeks, they've got senior art shows coming around, so that actually gives us flexibility to say to them you know, my sons off writing music right now, which you wouldn't have in your day if you were just taking another class. But I think, the reason I'm saying this, I think the verdicts out, I mean not in yet, on the whole CAM thing, and I think its great that people are rethinking and putting things together like the political action CAM and the PAC 1 PAC 2, those are great ideas, and even if they don't end up working or getting ultimately supported, or CAM's go away, we'll still have better ideas, I think for having made those changes. But I can't really predict where its going, because I think the money issue, is going to get real ugly before it gets better, and I think anything that is not essential, deemed essential, is going to you know you'll still be able to do em, but there's not going to be funding anymore.

Is there anything else that we haven't asked you that you'd like to state?

CAM-
ED

CAM

Well, you know, coming to Century, for me, I had been teaching for 16 years, before I came to century, I came here 17, and coming to century for me was almost a little bit like starting over again. Not in a bad way, but in a good way. At a point that's kind of considered your mid-career slump, I suddenly was revitalized and had a new sense of purpose that I didn't have, I kinda lost a lot of my vigor in the last couple years, where I'd been teaching before, cause it just was getting to being same old same old, and it there didn't look like there was really any, nothing new, really coming around the bend. And Century made that possible. And again, I think something to stress and ask about was, at least in the beginning stages I think Phil really built his vision around the people he could get rather than creating a vision and then making people fit. I think that's really one of the successes, that's what made it successful, is um, because, there's two tea- well in any job, there's methodology, and there's technique. Technique you can learn. But methodology, generally, I believe comes right out of your soul. I mean, and its kinda cool, your methodology will be related to how you've been shaped and formed by the various forces in your life, and if someone brings you in, under a vision that requires another methodology paradigm, and your temperament, your heart, your experiences haven't shaped you to fit that paradigm, then its like a square peg in a round hole, it doesn't ever really fits well, whereas If you look at people, and say, we need a person with that shape there, but you know there's another type of person over there who has this shape, and we need them, that's the perfect person for there, and then those programs will come in and eventually of course those people they'll go and they'll retire, but once something has become engrained and someone's successful, its easier to pick up rather than try to force something that isn't really destined to happen. I mean, this story, this is just a good story. Phil barnekoff, one time, was like at our, one of our parties type of things we had at his house, and he were talking about, it was early on, why all you, why are all you on the planning team? And he went around and told each one, in the whole group why he picked each of us. When he came to me he says, "I wanna tell you why I chose this guy." And I thought it was going to be because he one five national awards for his yearbook and he knew computer design really well, and so on and so on. And it was nothing like that. It was because he sat in on this presentation I used to give, special presentation I used to do for humanities, it was a 2 1/2 hour presentation with audio, video, and I even played my guitar during the presentation. And it was on the history of American popular music. And I started all the way back with the African slave narrative music and so on, and took it all the way up to contemporary music today. And he watched this presentation, and he said that he felt that if there was somebody who could pull all those different traditions and things together and put on this show. And it was really quite a show, in fact I used to say that if it was legal to have put pyrotechnics in it I would have, I would have blown off some flash pots too, you know, that a person like that could really run something like this communications lab. But it really had nothing to do with my computer abilities, or anything like that. He didn't really know anything about computers and never even pretended to care about computers, he just didn't, I remember, he had his secretary print off all his emails for him and he just didn't like computers. He played solitaire I think on his computer, I remember him saying that one a couple times, you know. Let's see, he was a guy. Dawn, by the way, Dawn is a great principal, but she lives, I think she's continued the legacy of Phil. I don't mean to suggest that she's not great, I think she's been great too, but Phil was one of those guys who was comfortable. He knew what he

Phil

knew- he knew what he did well, and he really was comfortable being that person and he didn't worry about what he didn't, couldn't do. There wasn't- he didn't try to be all things to all people, he knew, this is what I'm good at, and I'm going to find other people who are good at things that I'm not good at, and then I'll build a team, rather than I'm gonna be everybody's everything, and then they'll see how great I am, and they'll want to be great too. Which I don't think is a formula that works. You know, so it was very, this schools always been I think, very team oriented. And I think the challenge is to continue that feeling.